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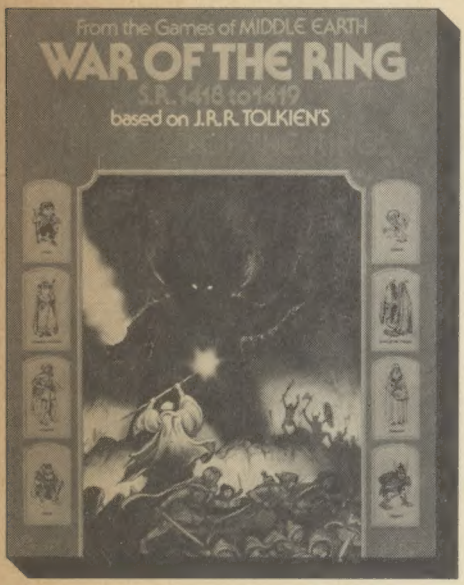

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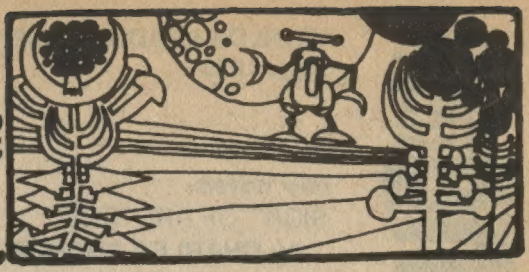
TED WHITE EDITORIAL



RAYMOND A. PALMER: Ray Palmer, the editor of this magazine for twelve years—1938-1949—died on August 15th in Tallahassee, Florida, at the age of 67, following a series of strokes.

I first "discovered" Ray Palmer—or "RAP" as he was familiarly known in his magazines—in 1952 when I found a copy of his *Other Worlds Science Stories* on sale at a Washington, D.C. newstand. I was fourteen and still discovering the more obscure stf magazines, many of which were not distributed (or were distributed erratically) to the newsstands around Falls Church. *Other Worlds* had a unique feel to it, not the least of which was the personalized editorials and long replies to letters in the letter column, both signed "RAP". Although the fiction in *Other Worlds* was not always the best, it did grab me. Palmer had a fondness for what I later characterized as "paranoid science fiction": stories set in the present or near-present in which the protagonist discovers that Things Are Not As They Seem. For a fourteen-year-old in the early fifties that was exciting stuff. But more important than the fiction were the features. *Other Worlds* ran *free* personal ads from the magazine's readers: ads for fanzines, magazines or books wanted or for sale, clubs looking for new members, etc. And that letter column: readers wrote in with serious critiques of the magazine and were answered in kind. There was a strong feeling of *communication*: Palmer was a palpably *real* presence in the magazine.

I subscribed, of course—it was the only way to be sure I wouldn't miss an issue. And I sent away for all the back issues I'd missed; all were available. Soon I was writing Palmer long letters of comment—a few of which were published. I felt I knew him as a friend; I imagine many of his readers felt the same way.

Subsequently I began haunting the used magazine stores in D.C.—where old pulps could be had three for a quarter—and filling out my collection of stf magazines. Eventually I had many, if not all, of the issues of AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES which Palmer had edited for Ziff-Davis. I found them interesting, but less impressive. Palmer was an obvious presense in those magazines, but not on the same level he had been in *Other Worlds*. His editorials for AMAZING tended to be extended blurbs for stories in the current and upcoming issues; the letter columns were shorter and his replies quite terse in comparison to those in *Other Worlds*. Oh, occasionally he would be painted into a cover by H. W. McCauley—a fact duly noted in his editorial in that issue—but basically his work on AMAZING and FA was a job, and not the labor of love he made of *Other Worlds*. It was a disappointment to me.

Yet Palmer was an important editor of this magazine. He still holds the record for the longest tenure as editor (I suspect that, with nine years here,

(cont. on page 119)

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Charles Sheffield is one of the newer writers in our field, but already he has started carving out a name for himself. His stories have appeared in nearly every issue of Galaxy *during 1977, and will be appering here as regularly as possible. His "Power Failure" in last month's issue of our companion magazine,* FANTASTIC, *offered new indications of Sheffield's range of abilities, and it's an easy prediction that a year from now he will be a contender for the field's awards . . .*

SIGHT OF PROTEUS

CHARLES SHEFFIELD

THE NEW Fall Catalog had arrived that morning. Behrooz Wolf, like millions of others, had settled in to an evening of browsing and price comparison. As usual, there were many variations on most of the old forms, plus an intriguing set of others that BEC was releasing for the first time. Bey leafed through them, occasionally marking one for future reference.

After about an hour, his interest faded and his attention began to wander. He yawned, put down the catalog, and went to his desk in the corner of the room. He picked up and looked briefly at a couple of volumes on form-change theory. Then, still restless, he leafed through his casebook. Finally, he went and picked up the BEC catalog again. When the phone buzzed softly he gave an automatic mutter of annoyance, but the interruption was a welcome one. He pressed the wrist remote.

"Bey? Put me up on visual, will you," said the wall screen.

Wolf touched his wrist again and the cheerful, ruddy face of John Larsen appeared on the wall holo. He looked at the catalog and smiled. "I didn't know that was out yet. Tomorrow's the official release date. Sorry to call you at this hour, Bey, but I'm still over at the office."

"No problem. I couldn't get too interested in this, anyway. It's the usual irritation. The ones that appeal the most need a thousand hours of work with the machines, or else they have a lousy life-ratio."

"—Or they need a mass of computer storage, if they're anything like last spring's releases. How are the prices?"

"Up again. And you're right, they need more storage, too. Look at this one." He held up the open catalog. "I already have a billion words of primary storage and I still couldn't handle it."

Larsen whistled softly. "That's certainly a new one. It's the nearest thing I've seen yet to an avian form. What's the life-ration on it? Bad, I'll bet."

Wolf consulted the tables in the catalog and nodded agreement. "Less than 0.2. You'd be lucky to last ten

Illustrated by STEVE FABIAN

SIGHT OF PROTEUS

years with it. It might be all right in low-g, but not otherwise. In fact, there's a footnote that says it can achieve flight in a lunar gravity or less." He closed the catalog. "So, what's happening, John? I thought you had a date—why the midnight oil?"

Larsen shrugged. "We've got a mystery. I'm stuck, and it's the sort of thing you thrive on. Do you feel up to a trip back to the office, tonight? You're the boss, but I'd really like your opinion."

Wolf hesitated. "I wasn't planning to go out again. Can't we handle it over the holo?"

"I don't think so. But I can show you enough to persuade you to come over here." Larsen's voice took on a more serious tone. "Bey, what do you make of this I.D. code?"

Wolf looked at the I.D. code that Larsen was holding forward. "Nothing special. Somebody we know? Let me check it through my percomp."

Larsen watched in silence as Wolf entered the digits of the chromosome I.D. code that had replaced fingerprint, voiceprint and retinal patterns as the absolute identification method. The link from his personal computer to central files was almost instantaneous. When the response came, Wolf frowned at it, then looked in annoyance at Larsen.

"What's the game, John? There's no such chromosome I.D. in the files. Did you make it up?"

"Nothing so simple." Larsen reached off-screen and picked up a printed report. "I told you, it's a strange one. This afternoon, a medical student was in the Transplant Ward of Central Hospital when a liver transplant case came in. He's been taking a course in chromosome analysis, so he had the idea of doing an I.D. check on the donor liver—just to see if he had the technique right."

"That's illegal, John. He can't have a license to use that equipment."

"He doesn't. He did it anyway. When he got home, he fed the I.D. code into central files and asked for donor identification and matching. I just gave you the I.D. that he found. When the files couldn't produce a match, he called us."

Bey Wolf looked sceptical—but intrigued. "He must have made a measurement error, John."

"That's what I told him. He said he'd done it three times, to check that he was handling the technique correctly."

"But there's just no way to fake a chromosome I.D. He's saying that the liver came from a person who has never existed."

John Larsen shrugged. "My conclusion exactly. Well, Bey? See you over here in half an hour?"

THE EVENING SHOWER was over and the streets were again a wild, colorful chaos. Bey Wolf threaded his way through the mass of people, navigating the slideways with practised ease. With the population at eight billion, crowding was normal, night or day. Wolf, preoccupied, was scarcely aware of the crowd around him.

How could anybody have escaped the chromosome typing? It was performed at three months, right after the humanity tests—and it had been that way for eighty or ninety years. Could the donor be old, a dying ancient? Ridiculous. Regardless of a donor's wishes, no one would dream of using a ninety year old liver for a transplant operation. Bey's thin face was puzzled. Could it be from offworld? No, that wouldn't explain it. The United Space Federation I.D.'s

were separately filed, but they were still recorded at Central Data.

He was beginning to feel the old mixture, a tingle of excitement modulated by a fear of disappointment. His job in Form Control was a good one—he didn't know of any better, and he had been highly successful in it. But it was not completely satisfying. Somehow, he always seemed to be waiting for the big challenge, the problem that would stretch him to the limit. Maybe, he thought, just maybe this could be the one. At thirty-four, a man should know what he wants to do with the rest of his life—he shouldn't still be full of the heart-searching of adolescence.

The crowds surging on the slideways didn't seem to share Wolf's worries. They looked happy, young, handsome and healthy. To people living two hundred years earlier they would have seemed models of perfection. Forget the high prices and the mass of computer storage that was needed. BEC—the Biological Equipment Corporation—could fairly claim to have transformed the world; at least, that part of it that could afford to pay. And here, on the west side of the city, affluence was the norm.

Only the General Coordinators knew what a tricky job it was to keep an economic balance in the world. It was poised on a knife-edge of available resources. Constant subtle adjustments were needed to hold it there. Every day, there must be corrections for the effects of drought, crop failure, forest fire, epidemic, power plant breakdown. Every day, the General Coordinators waited grimly for the time when the corrections would fail, and the system would run amok into world-wide slump and economic collapse. In a united world, the failure of one delivery system means the failure of all. Only the three million citizens of the United Space Federation could cling to a shaky independence—and the U.S.F. watched the economic indicators as nervously as any Earth-based Coordinator.

As he passed through the slideway system, Wolf kept an automatic eye open for illegal forms. Make-up and plastflesh could hide a good deal, but he had been specially trained to see past the outward form, to the shape of the underlying body structure. The chances of running into an outlawed form here, on the west side, were small. But Bey still had occasional nightmares about the feline form he had spotted, two years earlier. It had cost him two months out of action, in the accelerated change and recovery rooms of the Form Control hospital unit.

He made the final transition to the slowest slideway, and noticed again the large number of rounded Elizabethan foreheads on the people he was passing. That had been a Spring Catalog special, and a big hit. He wondered what the fall attraction would be—dimples? an Egyptian nose?—as he printed into Form Control and went up to Larsen's third floor office.

As Bey Wolf climbed the stairs, three miles east of him a solitary, white-coated figure dialed a vault combination and stepped through into the underground experiment room, four floors below City level. The face and figure would be familiar to any scientist. Albert Einstein—Einstein at forty, at the very height of his powers.

He made his way slowly down the long room, checking the station monitors at each working tank. Most

received only a few seconds of attention and an occasional adjustment of a control setting, but at the eleventh station he examined the outputs closely, then grunted and shook his head. He stood motionless for several minutes, deep in thought. At last he continued his patrol and went on into the general control area at the far end of the room.

Seated at the console, he called out the detailed records for the eleventh station and displayed them on the screen. Then he was again immobile for many minutes, twisting a lock of his long, greying hair around his forefinger as he bent over the displays of feed rates, nutrient mix, program swapping and vital indicators. Finally, he emerged from his concentration and cleared the screen. He switched to voice recording mode.

"November 2nd. Continued deterioration in tank eleven. Vital indicators are down by a further two percent and there is renewed instability in the bio-feedback loops. Change parameters were re-calibrated tonight." He paused, reluctant to take the next step. At last he went on. "Prognosis: poor. If there is no improvement in two days, the case must be aborted."

Moving quickly now through the dimly-lit room he re-set the monitors at each station and switched on the tell-tales. After a final look around him he locked the vault and entered the elevator that would take him back to ground level. More than ever now the face was that of Einstein. Over the warmth, intellect and humanity was laid the pain and torment of a man who worried for the whole world.

JOHN LARSEN, still fresh-faced and cheerful despite the late hour, looked at Bey closely when he came in.

"Late nights don't seem to agree with you," he said. "You don't look too good. Been neglecting your conditioning program?"

Wolf shrugged and involuntarily blinked his eyes several times. "It shows, does it? I was born a bit myopic. If I don't work out regularly, I get eyestrain. I'll have a full session on the bio's—tomorrow."

Larsen raised a sceptical eyebrow. Bey Wolf was famous for his 'tomorrow' statements. He had inherited subtlety and shrewdness from his Persian mother, along with tenacity and attention to detail from his German father. But from the Persian side had also come a tendency to procrastination. Bey swore that there was no word just like *'mañana'* in the Persian language—there were a dozen similar words, but none with that degree of urgency. His delays didn't seem to apply to his work, where he was highly effective. Dark-haired and dark-complexioned, of medium height and build, he had an uncanny ability to efface himself totally and disappear into any crowd; a useful talent for an investigating agent in the Office of Form Control.

Larsen had picked up a typed sheet from his desk, and he offered it to Wolf.

"Well, here it is. A signed, sworn statement from Luis Rad-Kato—the medical student. It gives the time, tells what he did, what the liver I.D. showed, and where he filed it."

Wolf took the paper and glanced over it. "Did you pull the records on this out of Central Data, to check the exact filing?"

"Sure. I did that as soon as I got the report. It was still in the scratch file. I'll read it out again for you."

He dialed the entry code and the

two men waited as the data search was performed. After a few seconds Larsen frowned and said, "There shouldn't be this much delay. Last time the response was almost instantaneous. Maybe I goofed on the access code."

He hit the priority interrupt key and re-entered the code. This time the message was flashed quickly onto the display. 'Entry code does not correspond to record in file. Check reference and re-enter.'

"Damnation! This can't be right, Bey. I used that code only an hour ago."

"Let me have a go. I know the supervisor entry codes for that area of central storage."

Wolf, more at home with computers than Larsen, took over the console. He entered the control language statements that allowed him access to the operating system and began to screen the storage files. After a few minutes' work he froze the display. "This is the area, John. Talk about bad luck. The data dump indicates a hardware failure in the medical records section, less than an hour ago. A whole group of records—including the area where the file we want was stored—has been lost. They were erased when the system went down."

Larsen looked unhappy. "A lousy time for it to happen, Bey. Now it will be a pain to follow up. We'll have to call Central Hospital and ask for a new check on the liver I.D. They won't like it, but if we get Doctor Morris in the Transplant Department he'll arrange to do it for us."

"Tonight?"

"Can't be done. It's eleven now and Morris works the day shift. We won't get any action until tomorrow. I'll call and leave a request for the morning." He sat down at the video link and prepared to call the hospital, then paused. "Unless you want to go over in the morning and check it in person? We'd get faster action that way."

Wolf shrugged. "Might as well. Tonight's shot anyway. Let's leave it until tomorrow."

Larsen was still apologetic. "It must be a million to one chance, losing the record like that."

"More than that, John. The scratch record is copied into a master, soon after entry, so there's always a backup copy. The accident must have happened before they could get the copy for permanent storage. I've never heard of such a thing before—it must be one in a billion, maybe a trillion."

He seemed thoughtful and dissatisfied as they went together into the still-crowded streets.

"I've had no dinner, and I broke a date to follow this thing," said Larsen. "I haven't been outside since this morning. What's new on the slideways?"

Wolf looked amused. "If you mean women, I wasn't looking too much on the way over. I saw a couple of new ones this afternoon—styles straight from Old Persia. Fantastic eyes. It would be nice if they caught on and came into fashion."

They merged into the slidewalkers. Like most members of Form Control, the two men were wearing simple forms, close to those given by Nature. Years of change training, plus chilling exposure to the outlawed forms, made change for pleasure and entertainment a doubtful attraction. It took an intriguing form indeed to tempt them to experiment. The bio-feedback machines were popular in Form Control for health, not cosmetics. Before Bey Wolf went to bed he took a short program for his myopia, and resolved

to take a more complete physical overhaul—tomorrow.

THE MEETING was running well over its scheduled one hour. That happened often. Every year the list of petitioners grew longer, and every year the committee had to weigh more factors in deciding on the new legal forms.

Robert Capman, committee chairman, looked at his watch and called the meeting again to order. "We're late, ladies and gentlemen. This must be our final decision for today. Turn, if you please, to the description of the twentieth petition. Perhaps I can summarize in the interests of speed.

"The basic form is mammalian aquatic. You will see that fourteen variations are also being applied for here. The petitioner points out that one of the variations has a life-ratio a little better than one—1.02, to be precise. This could translate into an extension of a year or two on a user's life span. BEC has already stated that they would consider this form and all its variations as Type I Programs, fully certified and supported by BEC warranties. Now, your comments, please."

Capman paused. He had the gift—part instinct, part experience—that allowed him to control the pace of the meeting precisely. There was a stir at the far end of the long table.

"Yes, Professor Richter. You have a comment?"

Richter cleared his throat. He was a lean, fastidious man with a neat, black beard. "A question, really. I notice that the basic form can supposedly be reached with less then two hundred hours of machine interaction. I know that the main external change is just the addition of gills to the human form, but that interaction time seems remarkably little. I question its accuracy."

Capman smiled and nodded. "An excellent point, Jacob. I had the same thought myself when I re-read this petition." Richter warmed to the praise in Capman's tone. "I now believe that the statement is accurate. This petitioner seems to have achieved a real break-through. As you know, a form is usually reached with less effort when it corresponds to one somewhere in our own genetic history."

Richter nodded vigorously. "Indeed, yes. I have always thought that to be the reason why the avian forms have proved so difficult to realize. Are you suggesting that the petitioner has developed a form that relates to our own descent?"

"I believe so. He has contributed to the present science of metamorphosis and also given us a new insight into our own evolutionary background."

There was a stir of excitement around the table. Capman rarely offered personal comment on a petition. He left it to the committee to make their own evaluation and recommendation. His praise carried weight. The approval for the use of the new form was swiftly given and the ecstatic petitioner received the formal congratulations of the committee. He left in a blissful daze, with good reason; adoption of his form by BEC as Type I programs made him an instant millionaire.

When the petitioner had gone, Capman called the meeting once more to order. "That concludes the consideration of petitions for today. There is still one extraordinary item of business that I want to bring to your attention before we leave. We cannot resolve it now, but I urge you to think about it in the next few

weeks."

He motioned to one of the Minutes Secretaries, who handed a thin folder to each committee member.

"These contain some details of an unusual petition request that we received last week. It has not yet been through the conventional screening process, because I thought we should consider it directly in this committee. It has a life-ratio close to 1.3."

There was a sudden hush. Members stopped straightening their papers preparatory to leaving and gave Capman their full attention.

"The petitioner does not emphasize this," went on Capman, "But extensive use of the form could increase average life expectancy to more than a century. One other point; the form is outwardly normal. The changes are mainly in the medulla oblongata and the endocrine glands."

At the far end of the table, Richter had raised his hand. "Mister Chairman, I must urge great caution in discussing this form outside the committee. We can guess the general reaction if people see a chance to increase their life span by thirty percent."

Capman nodded. "That was going to be my next point. There is still another reason why this form must be given special attention. As many of you know, I also serve as consultant and technical advisor to the General Coordinators. It is in that role that I am most worried by this petition. Widespread use of any form with a life-ratio this high could eventually push the world population above ten billion. We don't have the resources to support such a level."

He closed his notebook. "On the other hand, I'm not sure we have the right to suppress a petition. The petitioner presumably knows his legal rights. I would like to get your opinion on this next month, after you have had the time to think about it. The meeting is now adjourned."

He smiled at the participants, gathered his papers, and hurried from the room.

After the other committee members had also left, the Minutes Secretaries remained to compare notes. The junior of the two skipped through his recording, then compared it with his transcript.

"I show one clean acceptance," he said. "Two conditional acceptances subject to further tests, two more to be continued with sponsored research grants. That leaves fifteen outright rejections, according to my count."

"Check. It's funny how the percentages seem to run about the same each time, no matter what the petitions are." The blonde girl tried an experimental flutter of her eyelashes. Getting the form of the Marilyn variations was fairly easy, but the mannerisms took lots of practice. "There, how's that?"

"Not bad. You're improving. I'll let you know when you get it perfect. Look, do you think we should make any special notes on the rejected forms? There's at least one that might be worth a comment."

"I know. The petitioner who tried to develop the wheeled form? I don't know what we could put in the transcript. 'Widespread laughter from the Committee Members'? They had a hard time controlling themselves, the way he was hopping and rolling around. It's better to say nothing. I wonder why somebody would go to that much trouble to make a fool of himself?"

"Come on, Gina, we both know why."

"I guess so. Money will always do it."

Of course. *'Would you like to be rich? Then develop a new form to catch the public fancy. You will get a royalty from every user.'* Sounds easy? Not really. All the simple forms were explored long ago. The change specialists are driven all the time to more exotic and difficult variations—and whatever you come up with will have to pass the petition boards. One in a million hits the jackpot.

'BEC will sell you a low-cost experimental package, allowing you to create your very own form-change programs.' True. But now read the fine print. *'BEC takes no responsibility for reduced life expectancy or unstable physical-mental feedback resulting from form-change experiments.'* Of course, if you are lucky enough to hit on a really successful form, it has to be sold through BEC. Your royalty is factored into their prices. Lucky BEC.

Some statistics may be interesting. Licensed form-change experimenters: one-and-a-half million. Living millionaires from new form inventions: one hundred and forty six. Deaths per year directly ascribed to form-change experiments: seventy-eight thousand. Form-change experiment is a risky business.

The Minutes Secretaries didn't realize they saw only the cream of the crop. Only the best forms—less than one in fifty—made it through to the final petition. Many of the failures finished in the organ banks.

"We should include a summary on the humanity-test proposal, Gina."

"Right. I sketched out a short statement while they were still debating it. How about this. 'The proposal that the humanity test could be conducted at two months instead of three months was tabled pending further tests.' "

"I think it needs a bit more detail than that. Doctor Capman pointed out what an argument the present humanity test caused among religious groups when it was first introduced. BEC had to show total success in a hundred thousand test cases, before the Council would approve it." He skimmed rapidly through the record. "Why don't we simply add this quote, verbatim, from Capman's remarks? 'Unless an equally large sample is analyzed now, showing that the two and the three month test results are identical, the proposal cannot be forwarded for consideration.' "

They were both too young to remember the great humanity debates. What is a human? The answer, slowly evolved but not clearly stated for many years, was simple: an entity is human if and only if it can accomplish purposive form-change using the biofeedback systems. The age of testing had been pushed slowly back, to one year, to six months, to three months. If BEC could prove its case, it would soon be two months. The price of failure in the test was high—euthanasia—but resistance had slowly faded before remorseless population pressure. Resources to feed babies who could never live a normal human life were not available. The banks never lacked for infant organs.

Gina had locked her recorder. She pushed back her blonde hair with a rounded forearm and threw a smoldering look at her companion.

"Still not quite right," he said critically. "You should droop your eyelids a bit more, and pout that lower lip."

"Damn. It's hard. How will I know when I'm getting it right?"

He picked up his recorder. "Don't worry. I told you, you'll know from my reaction."

"I ought to try it on Doctor Capman—he's the ultimate test, don't

you think?"

"Impossible, I'd say. He apparently lives for his work. I bet he doesn't have more than a couple of minutes left over from that. Look,"—only half joking—"if the hormones are running too high in that form, I might be able to help you out."

Gina's response was not included in the conventional Marilyn data-set.

THE TELL-TALES on the experiment stations glowed softly. The only sounds were the steady hum of air and nutrient circulators and the click of pressure valves inside the tanks. Seated at the control console, he looked once again at the records of experiment status. It had been necessary to abort the failure on the eleventh station—again the pain, the loss of an old friend. How many more? But the replacement was doing very well. Maybe he was getting closer after all, perhaps the dream of forty years could be achieved.

He had not chosen his outward form lightly. It was fitting that the greatest scientist of the twenty-second century should pay homage to the giant of the twentieth. But how had his model borne the guilt of Hiroshima, of Nagasaki? For that secret he would have given a great deal.

THE UNEXPECTED LOSS of the data set containing the unknown liver I.D. had nagged all night like a subliminad. By the time Bey Wolf reached the Form Control offices his perplexity was showing visibly on his face. When they set off for Central Hospital, Larsen mistook Wolf's expression for irritation at being called out on a wasted mission the previous night.

"Just another hour or two, Bey," he said. "Then we'll have direct evidence."

Wolf chewed his lip. "Maybe, John," he said at last. "But don't count on it. I don't know why it is, but whenever I run across a really interesting problem, something comes along and knocks it away. Remember the Pleasure Dome case?"

Larsen nodded without comment. Both men had come close to resigning over that one. Illegal form-changes were being carried out in Antarctica, as titillation for the jaded sexual appetites of top political figures. Wolf and Larsen had discovered what was going on and been hot on the trail when they were abruptly called off by the central office. The whole thing had been hushed up and the situation left to cool. There were big players in that particular game.

As the slideways transported them towards the hospital, both men gradually became more subdued. It was a natural response to the surroundings. The buildings were becoming shabbier, the inhabitants moved more furtively, the dirt and refuse became noticeable. Central Hospital stood at the edge of Old City, where wealth and success handed over to poverty and failure. Not everyone could afford the BEC programs and conditioning procedures. In the depths of Old City, the old forms of humanity lived side-by-side with the worst surviving failures of the form-change experiments.

The bulk of the hospital loomed at last before them. Very old, built of heavy grey stone, it stood like a fortress protecting the new city from Old City. Moves to tear it down had all failed, and now it seemed almost a monument to form-change. Inside it, the first BEC developments had been tested—long ago, before the fall of India; but the importance of the hos-

pital's work had lived on, deep in human memory.

The two men paused in the Main Lobby and looked about them. The hospital ran with the frantic pace and total organization of an ants' nest. The status displays in front of the receptionist flickered constantly, like the console of a spaceport control center.

The young man seated at the controls seemed able to ignore it completely. He was deep in a thick, blue-bound book, his consoles set for audio interrupt if attention was needed. He looked up only when Wolf and Larsen were standing directly in front of him.

"You need assistance?" he asked. Wolf looked at him closely. His face, now that it was no longer turned down to his book, looked familiar—oddly familiar, but in an impersonal way. It was as though Bey had seen a holograph of him, but never seen him in person.

"We have an appointment with Doctor Morris of the Transplant Department," said Larsen. "I called him first thing this morning to arrange some I.D. tests. He told us to come here at ten."

While Larsen was speaking, Wolf had managed to get a closer look at the book sitting on the desk; old, from the look of it, and constructed from processed wood pulp; *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, by Christopher Marlowe. Suddenly, Wolf was able to complete the connection. He looked again at the man behind the desk, who had picked up a director, keyed it, and handed it to Larsen, saying, "Follow the directions as they come up. They will take you to Doctor Morris' office. Return it to me as you leave, please. It's programmed to lead you back here when you press 'Return'."

As Larsen took the route director, Wolf leaned over the desk and said, "William Shakespeare?"

The receptionist looked up in astonishment. "Why, that's quite right. Not one visitor in ten thousand recognizes me. How did you know? Are you a poet or a playwright yourself?"

Wolf shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Just a student of history, and interested in faces. I assume that you get a positive feedback from that form, or you wouldn't be using it. Has it helped a lot?"

"It's too soon to tell. I thought it was worth a try, even if the form-change theorists are sceptical. After all, athletes use the body forms of previous stars—why shouldn't the same method work just as well for an artist? It was a hassle changing to it, but I've decided to give it a year, at least. If it doesn't seem to work by them, I expect I'll change back to my old form."

Larsen looked puzzled. "Why not just stay as you are? The form you have is a good one. It's—"

He stopped abruptly in response to a quick kick from Bey, below desk-level, He stared at Wolf, then looked back at the receptionist.

"I'm sorry," he said finally. "I seem to be a bit dense this morning."

The receptionist looked at him with a mixture of amusement and embarrassment. "Don't apologize," he said. "I'm just surprised that either of you could tell. Is it all that obvious?" He looked down ruefully at his body.

Bey waved his hand. "Not at all obvious. Don't forget we're from the Office of Form Control—we're supposed to notice forms more than other people do. The only thing that tipped me off was your manner. You were behaving towards us more like a woman than a man."

"I guess I'm still not used completely to the male form. It's more difficult than you might think. I got used to the extra bits and the missing bits in a few weeks, but it's the human relationships that really foul you up. Some day when you have a few hours to spare, I could tell you things about the adjustment in my sex life that other people find hilarious. Mind you, I never saw the humor at the time."

Wolf's own interests extended to anything and everything, and quite overshadowed his tact. He couldn't resist a question. "People who've tried both usually say they prefer the female form. Do you agree?"

"So far I do. But maybe that's because I'm still learning to handle the male form properly. If this form doesn't pay off in my writing, I think I'll be very pleased to change back." He looked at the panel in front of him, where a cluster of violet and yellow lights were blinking madly. "I'm sorry, I have to get back to the board—there's a stuck conveyor on the eighth level. Just go where the location director tells you."

"We're on our way—and good luck with the writing," said Wolf.

As they went up to the fifth floor, Larsen could see the trace of a smile on Wolf's thin face.

"What is it, Bey? You only get that expression when there's a secret joke."

"Oh, it's nothing much. At least, I hope it's nothing much. I just wondered if our friend at the desk back there knows that for quite a while there were strong theories that the face he is wearing may have belonged to Shakespeare, but the plays were written by someone else—written by a woman, according to some people."

Bey Wolf was a pleasant enough fellow, but to appeal to him a joke had to have a definite twist to it. He was still looking pleased with himself when they reached the office of the Director of Transplants.

"THE LIVER came from a twenty-year old female hydroponics worker. whose skull was crushed in an industrial accident."

Doctor Morris, lean, intense and dishevelled, removed the reply slip from the machine and handed it to John Larsen, who stared at it in disbelief.

"But that's impossible! Only yesterday, the I.D. test gave a completely different result for that liver. You must have made a mistake, Doctor."

Morris shook his head firmly. "You were there when we did the microbiopsy on the transplanted liver. You saw me enter the sample for chromosome I.D. analysis. I think you are right—there's been a mistake all right. But it was made by the medical student who gave you the report."

"But he told me he did it three times."

"Then he probably did it wrong three times—it's no new thing to repeat a mistake. I trust you are not about to do that yourself."

Larsen was flushed with anger and embarrassment, and Morris, pale and overworked, was clearly resentful at what he thought was a careless waste of his time. Wolf tried to create a less heated atmosphere.

"One thing puzzles me a bit, Doctor Morris. Why did you use a transplant? Wouldn't it have been easier to re-develop a healthy liver, using the bio-feedback machines and a suitable program?"

Morris cooled a little. "Normally you would be right, Mr. Wolf. We use transplants for two reasons. Some-

times the original organ has been suddenly and severely damaged, so we don't have the time to use the re-growth programs; and sometimes it's more a question of speed and convenience."

"You mean in convalescence time?"

"Sure. If I give you a new liver from a transplant, you'll spend maybe a hundred hours, maximum, working with the bio-feedback machines—adjusting immune responses and body chemistry. With luck, it could be as low as fifty hours. But if you wanted to re-grow a whole new liver, there would probably be at least a thousand hours of work with the machines."

Wolf nodded. "That all makes sense. But didn't you check the I.D. of this particular liver, before you even began the operation?"

"That's not the way the system works. When the organs are first taken from their donors, they are logged in by a human—and the computer takes care of all the rest. It determines the I.D., also the main physical features of the organ, the place it will be stored, and so on. Then, when we need a donor organ, such as a liver, the computer machines the physical type of the patient with all the livers in the bank, and picks the most suitable one. Naturally, no one checks the organ I.D.—everything is automatic."

"So you never have any organs in the bank that didn't have their I.D.'s checked when they first entered it?"

"Not for adults," replied Morris. "Of course, there are many infant organs that don't have any I.D. on file. The only I.D.'s stored in Central Data are for humans who have passed the humanity-test."

"So it *is* possible for a liver to be in the banks, and have no I.D."

"An infant's liver, from a humanity-test failure. Look, Mr. Wolf, I see where you're heading, and I can assure you that it won't work. The patient in the case, as you saw for yourself, was a young adult. The liver we used was fully-grown, or close to it. I saw it myself at the time of the operation. It certainly didn't come from an infant."

Wolf shrugged his shoulders resignedly, "That's it, then. We won't take any more of your time. I'm sorry we've been a nuisance on this—but we have to do our job."

They turned to leave, and were met by a grey-haired man entering the doorway. He waved casually to Morris.

"Don't stop," he said. "I just dropped by to see what's happening. I noticed from the logs that you have visitors scheduled from Form Control."

"They're just leaving," said Morris. "Mr. Wolf and Mr. Larsen, I'd like to introduce you to the Director of the hospital, Robert Capman. This is an unexpected visit, Bob. I thought you had a meeting with the Building and Construction Committee this morning."

"I do. I'm on my way." He gave Wolf and Larsen a penetrating look. "I hope you gentlemen got the information that you want."

Wolf shrugged. "Not what we hoped we'd get. We ran into a dead end."

"Sorry to hear that." Capman smiled slightly. "If it's any consolation, that happens to us all the time in our work."

Again, he gave Wolf and Larsen that cool and curiously purposeful look. Bey felt a heightening of his own level of attention. He returned the measured scrutiny for several seconds, until Capman abruptly nodded

at the wall-clock and waved his hand in farewell.

"I'l have to go. I'm supposed to make a statement to the Committee in four minutes time."

"Problems?" asked Morris.

"Same old issue. More proposals to raze Central Hospital and put us all out in the green belt, away from the tough part of the City. Watch it on closed circuit, if you're interested. Channel twenty-three."

He turned and hurried out. Wolf raised his eyebrows. "Is he always in that much of a rush?"

Morris nodded. "Always. He's amazing. The best combination of theorist and experimenter I've ever met." He seemed to have calmed down. "Not only that, you should see him handle the committee."

"Id like to." Wolf took him literally. "Provided you don't mind us staying here to watch your display. One more thing about that liver." His tone was carefully casual. "What about the children who pass the humanity tests but have some sort of physical deformity? Don't they use organs from the ones who fail the tests?"

"We try and complete the repair work before the children can walk or speak—but you're quite right, we do grow the organs we need, from the humanity-test rejects. That's all done in Children's Hospital, over on the west side. They have special, child-size, bio-feedback machines there. We also prefer to do it there for better control. As you know very well, there are heavy penalties for allowing anyone to use a bio-feedback machine, if they are between two and eighteen years old—except for medical repair work, and under very close supervision. We like to get the children away from here completely, to prevent any accidental access to the form-change equipment."

Morris turned on the display screen. "I admire your persistence, Mr. Wolf, but I assure you it doesn't lead anywhere. Why all this emphasis on children?"

"There was one other thing in the report from Luis Rad-Kato—the medical student. He says that he not only did an I.D. check on the liver, he also did an age test. The age he determined was twelve years."

"Then that proves he doesn't know what he's doing. There are no organs used here from child donors—that work would be done at Children's Hospital. Your comment to Capman was a good one—you are trying to pursue this through a dead end. Spend your time on something else, that's my advice."

As he spoke, the display screen came alive. The three men turned to it and fell silent.

"FROM CHOICE, I wear the form of early middle age." Capman, in the few minutes since he had left the Transplant Department, had removed his hospital uniform and was now wearing a business suit. The committee who listened to him appeared to be composed largely of businessmen.

"However," went on Capman. "I am in fact quite old—older than any of you. Fortunately, I'm of long-lived stock, and I hope that I have at least twenty good years ahead of me. But I can remember the days before 'Lucy's In The Water' was a children's nursery song."

He paused for the predictable stir of surprise from the committee. Larsen turned from the display. "How long ago was that, Bey?"

Wolf's expression mirrored his own surprise. "Eighty-two years, I think—certainly more than eighty."

Capman was *old*. 'Lucy's In The Water' had come from the time when the Hallucinogenic Freedom League—the Lucies—had placed massive doses of hallucinogenic drugs in the water supply lines of most major cities. Nearly a billion people had died in the chaos that followed, as starvation, exposure, epidemic and mindless combat walked the cities and exacted their tribute.

"I remember the time," continued Capman, "when cosmetic form-change was still difficult and expensive; when it used to take many months of hard work to achieve a change that we can manage now in a couple of weeks; when fingerprint and voiceprint patterns were still being used as a form of legal identification, because the law had yet to accept the elementary fact that a man who can grow a new arm can easily change his fingertips."

Wolf frowned. As a student of history, he was almost certain that Capman was indulging in a little artistic license—the developments referred to stretched even further in the past than the Lucies. In fact, in a sense it had begun way back in the nineteenth century, when the first experiments had been performed on limb regeneration of amphibians.

A newt could grow a new limb. A man could not. Why?

No one could answer that question, until two fields merged in the 1990's: biological feedback, and real-time computer control. It had been known since the 1960's that a human could use display feedback devices to influence his involuntary nervous system, and even to modify the basic electrical wave rhythms of his brain. When computer-controlled instrumentation had been developed, to permit an electronic feedback continuously and in real time, the basic tools were at last on hand.

Success in minor things came first—replacement of lost hair and teeth. From those primitive beginnings, advances came rapidly. Replacement of lost fingertips was soon followed by programs for the correction of congenital malfunctions, for the treatment of disease, and for control of the degenerative aspects of aging. Then one day the dam broke. Programs were released that allowed a user to change his appearance—and all the world wanted to be taller, shorter, more beautiful, better proportioned. Suddenly, form-change allowed men and women to be just what they chose to be—and BEC, the Biological Equipment Corporation, had a monopoly on the basic equipment and programs, and held all the patents.

On the screen, Capman continued to build his case. "I remember, even if you do not, the strange results of the early days of form-change experiments, before the illegal forms had been defined. We had sexual monsters, physical freaks—all the repressions of a generation, released in one great flood. You do not remember what it was like before we had an Office of Form Control. I do. It was chaos."

Larsen noticed Morris was looking across at him. "Not far from chaos now in our office," he said. "We still see the wildest forms I can imagine."

Wolf waved him to silence. Capman was continuing. He had tremendous presence and persuasive powers. Bey was beginning to understand the basis for the respect—even hero-worship—that Morris showed when he spoke of the Hospital Director.

"All these things I remember, personally. Now, you members of the

committee may ask what all this has to do with Central Hospital's proposed move outside the city. It has a great deal to do with it. In *every one* of the advances I have referred to, this hospital—Central Hospital—has played a key role. To most people, this is a tangible monument to the past of form-change development. If we forget history, we may be compelled to repeat it. What better reminder of our difficult past can there be than the continued presence of this building? What better assurance that we will handle form-change with real care?

"I should finish by saying one more thing to you. To me, the idea of removing such a monument to human progress is unthinkable. Thank you."

Capman had swept up his papers, nodded to the committee, and was already on his way out of the room before the applause had died down. Morris looked ready to join in. His earlier irritation had disappeared. He even assured Wolf of his continued cooperation as they said a polite farewell and prepared to return to Form Control.

Outside, they felt free to let their own feelings show.

"*Tokhmir!* Where do we go from here, John? That was a dead end, all right."

"Give it up, I guess. Rad-Kato made a mistake, and we chased it into the ground. Aren't you convinced?"

"Almost. The thing that I still can't swallow is the loss last night of those data records. The timing on that was just too bad to be true. I'll admit that coincidences are inevitable—but I want to look at each one good and hard before I'll accept it. One more try—let's call Rad-Kato when we get back to the office.

"I AM QUITE SURE, Mr. Larsen." The young medical student was polite, and obviously a little uncomfortable, but his holo-image showed a firm jaw and a positive look in his eyes. "Despite what you heard from Doctor Morris, I did *not* make a mistake. The I.D. that I gave you yesterday was correctly determined. More than that, I can prove it."

Larsen pursed his lips and glanced at Wolf, standing next to him. "We already went through all that. The liver for the patient who received the transplant was biopsied for us today. We were there. We found a different I.D."

Rad-Kato was clearly surprised, but he looked stubborn. "Then perhaps you made a mistake—or perhaps it was a different liver."

"Impossible. We watched the whole thing."

"Even so, I can prove my point. You see, I wanted to run a full enzyme analysis on the sample that I took, as well as doing the chromosome I.D. I didn't have time to do all the work. So I stored part of the sample in the deep freeze over at the hospital. I intended to do the rest tonight."

"That's it, John!" Wolf was exultant. "It's about time we had a break. We've had nothing but bad luck so far. Look,"—to Rad-Kato—"can you stay right where you are until we get over there? We need part of that sample."

"Sure. I'll ask the receptionist to send you straight in to me."

"*No.* Don't do that. Don't tell *anybody*—not even your own mother—that you have that sample, or that Form Control wants to get hold of it. Expect us there in twenty minutes."

He cut the connection and turned to Larsen. "John, can you get over there at once and pick up the tissue sample? Bring Rad-Kato with you, and test the I.D. in our own labs. I'm beginning to get ideas on what's going on with this business. I need to work here with the computer. Somebody's been using some very fast footwork on us, and I'd like to find out who it is."

As soon as Larsen had hurried out, Wolf sat down at the terminal and began to call out data files. It was going to be a long, tedious business, even if he were right. He was still feeling his way into the system when Larsen returned with the results of the tissue test. Rad-Kato was right. He had made no mistake on his previous analyses; the liver I.D. did not exist in the files. Wolf nodded his satisfaction at the results, waved Larsen away, and carried on with his slow, painstaking search.

In the twelve hours that followed he moved from his chair only once, to find and swallow enough cortamine to keep him awake and alert through the long night ahead. The old tingle of excitement and anticipation was back. That would help as much as drugs.

In the underground lab, two red tell-tales in the central control section began to blink and a soft, intermittent buzzer was sounding. When he called out the monitor messages, the inference was easy. Certain strings of interrogation descriptors were being used on the central medical data files. His software to test for such queries was more than five years old and had never before been called on. He thanked his foresight.

One more tactic was available, but it was probably only a delayer. He could not count on much more time. The white-coated figure sighed and cancelled the monitor messages. It was time to begin the phase-out and move to the next part of the plan.

"Sit down, John. When you hear this you'll need some support."

Wolf was unshaven, nervous, and black under the eyes. His shoes were off and he was surrounded by untidy heaps of listings. Larsen squeezed into a clear spot next to the terminal.

"My God, Bey, what have you been doing here? Did you work right through? You look as though you've missed food and sleep for a week."

"Not that bad. A day." Wolf leaned back, exhausted but satisfied. "John, what did you think when you found out that Rad-Kato was right?"

"I was off on another case all yesterday and this morning, so I've not been worrying about it too much. I thought for a while that Morris maybe did something like palming the sample and substituting another one. The more I thought about that, the more stupid it sounded."

Wolf nodded. "That was my first thought, too. But we were both watching him. I didn't see how he could have done it. So what else could have happened? That's when I began worrying again about the computer failure and the loss of the records, the first night on the case. Two days ago, was it?" He leaned back. "It feels like weeks. Anyway, I used the terminal here to ask for the statistics on the loss of medical records due to hardware malfunction similar to the one we encountered. That was my first surprise. The failure is very rare, but the loss of medical data was averaging forty percent higher than other data types."

"You mean that the medical data bank hardware is less reliable then average, Bey?"

"That's what the statistics seemed to be saying. I couldn't believe that. So I asked for the medical statistics, year by year, working backwards. Data loss was consistently higher than average for the medical records, back to twenty-seven years ago. Then, suddenly, the loss rate dropped to the same level as the other data types."

Wolf had stood up from his chair and begun to pace the cluttered office.

"So where did that leave me?" he said. "It looked as though some medical records were being destroyed *intentionally*. I went back to the terminal, and I asked for the listing, a specific listing, of actual data areas that had been lost in the medical records, year by year. When I had those, I tried to deduce what it was that the lost data files must have contained.

"Take my advice, John, and don't ever try it. It's like trying to tell what a man is thinking from the shape of his hat. It's damned near hopeless, and I could get only generalities. I got four key-words from twenty-two hours of effort."

He stopped and took a deep breath. "Here's something for you. Did you ever hear of research projects with these names: Proteus, Timeset, Amphisbaena, and Lungfish?"

Larsen grimaced and shook his head at once. "They're all new to me."

"Me too. I got them by going to the index files that define the contents of data areas, and querying for the missing data files. That's the only information I could find on any of them, but they have one common feature. They have the same key medical investigator."

"Morris?"

"Higher than that, John. Robert Capman. I think he's been purging the data files of certain records, and faking it to make it look like a hardware failure. I told you you'd need a seat."

Larsen was shaking his head. "No way, Bey. No way. You're out of your mind. Look, Capman's the director of the hospital—you'd *expect* his name to show up all over the medical references."

"He isn't just the overall administrator for those projects, John—he's the single, key investigator."

"Even so, Bey, I can't buy it. Capman's supposed to be one of the best minds of the century, right? He's a consultant to the Planetary Coordinators. He's a consultant to the U.S.F. Why would he want to destroy data, even if he could? Can you give me one reason?"

Wolf sighed. "That's the hell of it. I can't give you a single, unarguable reason, but I can give you a lot of things that seem to tie in to Capman.

"One." He began to check off the points on his fingers. "Capman is a computer expert—most medical people are not. He knows the hardware and the software over at Central Hospital better than anyone else. I asked you how we could get the wrong liver I.D. when Morris did the test. I can think of only one way. Morris put the sample in correctly—we saw him do it—but the data search procedures that do the I.D. searches had been tampered with. Somebody changed the software to report back to us with the wrong I.D. Morris had nothing to do with it. Now, I'll admit that doesn't prove a thing—it's conjecture.

"Two. Capman has been at the hospital, in a high position, for a long time. Whatever is going on there has

been happening for at least twenty-seven years."

"Bey," broke in Larsen impatiently. "You can't accuse a man just because he's been in the job for a long time. I'm telling you, if you tried to present this to anyone else, they'd laugh you out of their office. You don't have one scrap of *evidence*."

"Not that I could offer in a court of law, John. But let me keep going." Wolf had a look on his face that Larsen had learned to respect, an inward conviction that only followed a period of hard, analytical thought. "Three. Capman has full access to the transplant banks. He would have no trouble in placing organs into them, or in getting them out. If he chose to, he could dispose of unwanted organs there, and the chance that he would be found out would be very small—I think it happened, by a freakish accident, when Rad-Kato did that test the other night.

"A couple more points, then I'm done. According to the records, Capman personally does the final review of the humanity-test results carried out at Central Hospital. If those test results were being tampered with, Capman is the only person who could get away with it safely. Last point. Look at the hospital organization chart. All the activities I've mentioned lead to Capman."

Wolf flashed a chart onto the display screen, with added red lines to show the links to Capman. Larsen looked at it stonily.

"So what, Bey? Of course they all lead to him. Damn it, he's the director, they *have* to lead to him. He's ultimately responsible for everything that's done there."

Wolf shook his head wearily. "We're going round in circles. Those lines end with Capman, but not in his capacity as Director. They end far below that. It looks as though he chose to take a personal and direct interest in those selected activities. Why just those?

"There are a couple of other things I haven't had time to explore yet. Capman has a private lab on the first floor of the hospital, next to his living quarters. No one knows what he does there—the lab is unattended except by robo-cleaners. Capman's an insomniac who gets by on two or three hours sleep a night, so he works in the lab, alone, most evenings until the small hours. What does he do there?

"Then there are a couple more things that are less tangible."

"*Less* tangible?" Larsen snorted in disgust, but Wolf was not about to stop.

"Capman 'dropped in' on our meeting with Morris yesterday. Why? He had no reason to—unless he wanted to get his own feel for what we were doing. I don't know how much you felt it, but he looked at the two of us as though he had us under a microscope. I've never had such a feeling of being weighed and measured by someone. One final point, then I'm done. Capman has had absolute control in that hospital for nearly forty years. Everybody there knows he is a genius and they do whatever he wants without questioning. If I know anything about human psychology, he probably thinks of himself by now as above the law."

Larsen was looking at him quizzically. "That's all very nice. Now give me some real evidence. With one piece of solid fact tying in to Capman, I'd be convinced. Everything you've said is still guesswork and intuition. I know you're seldom wrong, but—"

He was interrupted by the soft

buzz of the intercom. Wolf keyed his wrist remote and was silent for a few seconds, listening to his phone implant. Then he cut the connection and turned back to Larsen.

"Real evidence, John? Here's your solid fact. That was the Director of the Office of Form Control—Steuben himself. He has had a request for our services—the two of us, specifically, by name—to help investigate a form-change problem for the U.S.F. on Tycho Base."

"When?"

"At once. We have orders to drop any other cases—he didn't say what—and leave tomorrow for the Moon. The request came direct from the office of the General Coordinators, just ten minutes ago. When does coincidence get to be past believing?"

"I don't know anybody in the General Coordinators office, Bey. Do you?"

"Not a soul. But somebody there—or one of their consultants, such as you-know-who—seems to know us. And wants us off this case. Like to take a bet?"

Larsen's cheerful expression was gone completely. He looked again at the display of Central Hospital organization, with its glowing lines leading to Capman, and shrugged resignedly.

"Supposing you're right, Bey, we've still been put out of action. What can we do in one day?"

Wolf looked ready for a fight. He rose to his feet. "We can do one thing. We can take a look at Capman's private lab."

"But we'd need a search warrant for that from the head office."

"Leave that to me. It reveals just what we are doing, but that can't be helped. I'd like to get there this afternoon, while Morris is still on duty—we may need some assistance."

"What do you expect to find, Bey?"

"If I could tell you we wouldn't need to go. I want to know how those projects in the missing files—Proteus and the rest of them—tie in to an unidentifiable liver in the Transplant Department. We don't have much time. Let's plan to get out of here half an hour from now."

On the way to the hospital, Larsen was silent and uncommunicative. Wolf noticed that he was listening intently to his phone implant, and guessed the reason.

"Any change on the situation at home, John?" he asked, when Larsen finally cut the connection.

Larsen looked somber. He shook his head unhappily. "Nothing new, I'm afraid. She's still going down fast. She knows it, too. She's using the machines all the time but it's not doing any good."

He drew a deep breath, then added, "How do you tell someone you love that the best solution now is to go gracefully?"

Wolf could not give him an answer. It was a problem that every family dreaded. Just as BEC's work had provided an answer to the old question of defining humanity, it also provided a definition of old age. Life expectancy was still about eighty years for most people; fertile, healthy years spent in peak physical condition. Then one day the brain lost the power to follow the profile of the bio-feedback regimes. Rapid physical and mental decline followed, each reinforcing the other. Most people chose to visit the Euth Club as soon as they realized what was happening. An unfortunate few, afraid of the unknowns of death, rode the roller-coaster all the way down.

Larsen finally broke the silence. "You know, Bey, I've never seen old age before. Can you imagine what it must have been like when half the world was old? Losing hair and teeth and eyesight and hearing." He shuddered. "A couple of hundred years ago, I suppose it was all like that. How could they stand it?"

Wolf looked at him closely. With a difficult time coming at Central Hospital, he had to be sure that Larsen was up to it.

"They had a different attitude in those days, John," he said. "Aging used to be considered as normal, not as a degenerative disease. In fact, some of the signs used to be thought of as assets, proof of experience. Imagine living a couple of hundred years before that, if you really want to scare yourself. No anesthetics, no decent pain-killers, and no decent surgery."

"Sure, but somehow you can't really think of it. You only really know it when you see it for yourself. It's like being told that in the old days people lived their whole lives blind, or with a congenital heart defect, or missing a limb. You don't question it, but you can't imagine what it must have been like."

They moved on, and finally Wolf spoke again.

"Not just physical problems, either. If your body and appearance were fixed at birth, think how many emotional and sexual problems you might have."

The outline of Central Hospital was looming again before them. They left the slideways and stood together in front of the massive columns bordering the main entrance. Each time they entered, it seemed that old fears were stirred. Both men had taken the humanity-tests here, although of course they had been too young to have any memory of it. This time it was Larsen who finally took Wolf by the arm and moved them forward.

"Come on, Bey," he said. "They won't test us again. I'm not sure you'd pass if they did. A lot of people in Form Control say part of you isn't human. Where did you get the knack of sniffing out the forbidden forms they way you do? They all ask me, and I never have a good answer."

Wolf laughed. "They could do it as well as I can if they used the same methods and worked at it as hard. I look for peculiarities—in the way people look, or the way they sound and dress and move and smell—anything that doesn't fit. After a few years it gets to be subconscious. I sometimes couldn't tell you what the giveaway was without a lot of thought, after the fact."

They were through the great studded doors. The same receptionist was on duty. He greeted them cheerfully.

"You two seem to have caught Doctor Capman's fancy. He gave me this code for you. You can use it anywhere in the hospital—he said you would need it when you got here."

He smiled and handed an eight-digit dial-code to Wolf, who looked at Larsen in surprise.

"John, did you call and say we were coming?"

"No. Did you?"

"So how the devil did he—?"

Wolf broke off and walked quickly to a wall query-point. He entered the code and at once a brief message flashed onto the viewing screen. 'Mr. Wolf and Mr. Larsen are to be given access to all units of the hospital. All staff are requested to cooperate fully with Central Form Control investigations. By order of the Director, Robert Capman.'

Larsen frowned in bewilderment.

"He can't have known we'd be here. We only decided it half an hour ago."

Wolf was already walking towards the elevator. "Believe it or not, he knew. We'll find out how some other time. Come on."

As they were about to enter the elevator, they were met by Doctor Morris, who burst at once into excited speech. "What's going on here? Capman cancelled all his appointments for today, just half an hour ago. He told me to wait for you. It's completely unprecedented."

Wolf's eyes were restless and troubled. "We don't have time to explain now, but we need help. Where is Capman's private lab? It's somewhere on this floor, right?"

"It is, along this corridor. But Mr. Wolf, you can't go in there. The Director has strict orders that he is not to be disturbed. It is a standard—"

He broke off when Wolf slid open the door, to reveal an empty study. The other two followed him as he went in and looked around. Wolf turned again to Morris.

"Where's the private lab?"

"Through here." He led the way into an adjoining room that was equipped as a small but sophisticated laboratory. It too was empty. They quickly examined both rooms, until Larsen discovered an elevator in a corner closet of the lab.

"Doctor, where does this lead?" asked Wolf.

"Why—I don't know. I didn't even know it was there. It must have been left over from the time before the new lift tubes were installed. But that's over thirty years ago."

The elevator had only one working button. Larsen pressed it and the three men descended in silence. Morris was counting to himself. When they stopped, he thought for a moment and nodded.

"We're four floors underground, if I counted correctly. I don't know of any facilities this deep under the main building. It has to be very old—before my time here."

The room they stepped out into, however, showed no signs of age. It was dust-free and newly-painted. At its far end stood a large vault door, with a combination lock built into the face. Wolf looked at it for a few seconds, then turned to Larsen.

"We don't have too many options. Good thing it's not a new model. Think you can handle it, John?"

Larsen walked up to the vault door and studied it quietly for a few minutes, then nodded. He began to move the jewelled key-settings delicately, pausing after each one. After twenty minutes of intense work, with frequent checks on his percomp, he drew a deep breath and carefully keyed in a full combination. He pulled, and after a moment's hesitation the great door swung open. They walked forward into a long, dimly-lit room.

Morris pointed at once to the line of great sealed tanks that ran along both walls of the room.

"Those shouldn't be here! They're special form-change tanks. They are like the ones we use for infants with birth-defects, but these are ten times the size. There shouldn't be units like this anywhere in this hospital!"

He moved swiftly along the room, inspecting each tank and examining its monitors. Then he came back to Wolf and Larsen, eyes wide.

"Twenty units, and fourteen of them occupied." His voice was shaking. "I don't know who is inside them, but I am quite certain that this whole unit is not part of the hospital facilities. It's a completely unauthorized form-

change lab."

Wolf looked at Larsen with grim satisfaction. He turned again to Morris.

"Can you tell us just what change work is going on in here?"

Morris thought for a moment, then replied, "If this is the usual layout, there has to be a control room somewhere. All the work records on the changes should be there—computer software, experimental designs, everything. It's not at this end."

They hurried together the length of the room. Morris muttered to himself in satisfaction when he saw the control room there. He went to the console and at once began to call out records for each of the experiment stations in turn. As he worked, his face grew paler and his brow was beaded with sweat. At last he spoke, slowly and in hushed tones.

"There are missing records, but I can already tell you something terrible and highly illegal has been going on here. There are humans in fourteen of those tanks. They are being programmed to adapt to pre-specified forms, built into the control software. And I can tell you one other thing. The subjects in the tanks are definitely of an illegal age for form-change work—my rough estimate puts them between two years old and sixteen years old, all of them."

It took a few seconds for that to sink in. Then Larsen said quietly. "You are telling us that there are human *children* in those tanks. That's monstrous. How can a child assess the risks that go with form-change?"

"They can't. In this case, the question of knowing the risk does not arise. The arrangement is a very special one, never used legally. The stimulus to achieve the programmed form-change is being applied directly to the pleasure centers of their brains. In effect, they have no choice at all. These children are being forced to strive for the programmed changes by the strongest possible stimulus."

He leaned back in the control console chair and put both hands to his perspiring forehead. When he finally spoke again, his voice was slurred and weary.

"I can't believe it. I simply can't believe it, even though I see it. In Central Hospital, and with Capman involved. He's been my idol ever since I left medical school. He seemed more concerned for individuals, and for humanity as a whole, than anyone I ever met. Now he's mixed up in this. It makes no sense. . . ."

His voice cracked and he sat hunched and motionless in his chair. After a few seconds, Wolf intruded in his troubled reverie.

"Doctor, is there any way that you can tell us what form-changes were being used here?"

Morris roused himself a little and shook his head. "Not without the missing records. Capman must have kept those separately somewhere. I can get the computer listings through the display here, but it would be a terrible job to deduce the program purpose from the object listings. There's a piece of code here that occurs over and over, for example, in one of the experiments. But its use is obscure."

"What do you think it is, Doctor?" asked Bey. "I know you can't tell us exactly, but can you get even a rough idea?"

Morris looked dubious. "I'll be reading it out of context, of course. It looks like a straightforward delay loop. The effect is to make each program instruction execute for a pre-set number of times before moving on to the next one. So everything would be

slowed down by that same factor, set by the user."

"But what would it do?"

"Heaven knows. These programs are all real-time and interactive, so it would be nonsensical to slow them all down." He paused for a second, then added, "But remember, these programs were presumably designed by Robert Capman. He's a genius of the first rank, and I'm not. The fact that I can't understand what is being done here means nothing. We need Capman's own notes and experiment design before we can really tell what he was doing."

Wolf was pacing the control room, eyes unfocused and manner intent.

"That's not going to be easy. Capman has left the hospital, I'll bet my brains on it. Why else would he have given us free run of the place? I don't understand that, even if he knew we were onto him. Somehow he tracked what we were doing, and decided he couldn't stop us. Unless we do trace him, we may never know what he was doing here."

He turned to Larsen in sudden decision. "John, go and get a trace sensor. It's my bet that Capman has been here, in this room, in the past hour. We have to try and go after him, even if it's only for his own protection. Can you imagine the public reaction if people found out he had been stealing human babies for form-change experiments? They'd tear him apart if they caught him. He must have got the children by faking the results of the humanity-tests."

Larsen hurried out of the vault. As he left, Morris suddenly looked hopeful.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Suppose that Capman were working with subjects that had *failed* the humanity-tests. That wouldn't be as bad as using human babies."

Wolf shook his head. "I had that thought, too. But it can't work. Remember, the whole point of the humanity-test is that non-humans *can't* perform purposive form-change. So they must be humans he's using, by definition. Not only that, remember that the liver we found came from a twelve year old. Capman didn't just have experiments, he had *failed* experiments, too. The organ banks were a convenient way of disposing of those, with small risk of discovery."

He continued to pace the room impatiently, while Morris sat slumped in silent shock and despair.

"God, I wish John would hurry up," said Wolf at last. "We need that tracer. Unless we can get a quick idea where Capman went, we're stuck."

He continued his pacing, and after another minute walked to the wall communicator set next to the control console. On impulse, he entered the eight-digit dial-code that had been left for him by Capman at the main lobby. This time, instead of the earlier message requesting cooperation with Form Control, a much longer message scrolled steadily into the viewer. Bey read it with steadily increasing amazement.

'Dear Mr. Wolf. Since you are reading this, you are in the private vault and have, as I feared after our first meeting, deduced the nature of my work here. I have known for many years that this day must come eventually, and I have resigned myself to the fact that this work will probably not be completed under my direction. Mr. Wolf, you may not know it yet, but you and I are two specimens of a very rare breed. It was apparent to me very quickly that this work would probably end with your

investigation. I regret it, but accept it.

'Long ago, I decided that I would prefer to live out my life in quiet anonymity, should this work be discovered, rather than endure the extensive and well-meaning rehabilitation program that would be inflicted on me as punishment for my criminal acts. To most, these deeds must appear unspeakable. To you, let me say that my work has always had as its objective the benefit of humanity. To that end, a small number of human lives have unfortunately been sacrificed. I fully believe that in this case the end justifies the means.

'In order to achieve the anonymity I desire, it will be necessary for Robert Capman to vanish from the Earth. It is unlikely that we will meet again. The risk for me would be too great, since I suspect that you and I would always recognize each other. As Homer remarks, such know each other always. Mr. Wolf, learn more form-change theory. Your gift for the practical will be wasted until you master the theoretical also. Do that, and nothing will be beyond you.

"This morning I completed all the necessary plans for my departure, and now I must leave. Believe me, there is a point where fame is a burden, and a quiet life among my recordings and holotapes is devoutly to be wished. I have reached that point. Sincerely, Robert Capman.'

That was the end. Wolf and Morris watched the screen intently, but nothing further appeared.

"I'm beginning to understand why you people in the hospital regard him as omniscient," said Wolf at last. "But I can't let him get away. If I can track him down, I have to do it. As soon as John Larsen gets here, we'll try and follow him, no matter where he's gone."

Morris did not reply. He seemed to have had more shocks than he could take in one day. He remained at the seat of the control console, slack-jawed and limp, until Larsen appeared at last through the great vault door.

"Sorry that took so long, Bey," he said. "I thought I'd better go by Campan's apartment and train the sensor on a couple of his clothing samples. It should be pretty well tuned now to his body chemistry. We should be ready to go any time. The sensor kept pointing this way, so he must have somehow exited from here. See any signs of a concealed way out?"

The two men began to search the wall areas carefully, while Morris looked on listlessly and uncomprehendingly. Finally, John Larsen found a loose wall panel behind an air-conditioning unit. Working together, they moved it aside and found that beyond it lay a long, narrow corridor, faintly lit with green fluorescence. Larsen held the trace sensor in the opening and the monitor light glowed a bright red. The trace arrow swung slowly to point along the corridor.

"That's the way he went, Bey," said Larsen. He turned to Morris. "Where will this lead?"

Morris pulled himself together and looked around him. "I'll have to think. The elevator was in the west corner of the study. So that would mean you are facing just about due east."

Bey Wolf pinched thoughtfully at his lower lip. "Just about what I expected," he said. "Where else?" He turned to Larsen. "That's the way we'll have to go, John, if we want to catch Capman. We'll be heading

straight into the heart of Old City."

TAKE the toughest and seediest of the twentieth century urban ghettos. Age it for two hundred years, and season it with a random hodge-podge of over- and under-ground structures. Populate it with the poorest of the poor, and throw in for good measure the worst failures of the form-change experiments. You have Old City, where the law walked cautiously by day, and seldom by night. Bey Wolf and John Larsen, armed with cold lights, stun-guns and trace sensor, emerged from the long underground corridor just as first dusk was falling. They looked around them cautiously, then began to follow the steady arrow of the tracer, deeper into Old City.

"Let's agree on one thing, John," said Wolf, peering about him with great interest. "While we're hunting Capman, we'll not be looking for the usual forbidden forms. For one thing, I expect we'll see more of them here than we've ever seen before. Look there, for example."

He pointed down the side alley they were passing. Larsen saw a hulking ursine form, standing next to a tiny, rounded man, not more than two feet tall. They had a reel of monofilament thread, which they were carefully unwinding and attaching to a frame of metal bars. Wolf kept walking.

"Run into that, and it would shear you in two, before you knew you'd been cut. They're obviously setting a trap. It's not for us, but we'd better watch how we go in here."

Larsen needed no reminding of that fact. His eyes tried to move in all directions at once, and he kept his hand close to his stun-gun.

"They don't look much like failed attempts at the usual commercial forms, Bey," he said. "I suppose that's what happens when some poor devil who's really twisted in the head gets hold of a form-change machine."

Wolf nodded. "They probably try and fight against taking those forms with their conscious minds, but something underneath dictates their shapes. Maybe in another hundred years we'll understand what makes them do it."

As he spoke, Wolf was coolly assessing all that he saw, and storing it away for future reference. Old City was off-limits for all but real emergencies, and he was making the most of a rare opportunity. They hurried on through the darkening steets, becoming aware for the first time of the total absence of street-lights. Soon, it was necessary to use the cold lights to show their path. The tracer arrow held its steady direction. As night fell, the inhabitants of Old City who shunned the day began to appear. Larsen held tighter to the handle of his gun as the sights and sounds around them became more alien.

They finally reached a long, inclined ramp, leading them below ground level again. Larsen checked the tracer, and they continued slowly downward. Their lights lit up the tunnel for ten yards or so, and beyond that was total blackness. A grey reptilian form with a musty odor slid away from them down a side passage, and ahead of them they heard a chitinous scratching and scuttling as something hurried away into the deeper shadows. Wolf stopped, startled.

"That's one to tell them about back at the office. Unless I'm going mad, we've just seen someone who has developed an exoskeleton. I wonder if he has kept a vertebrate structure with it?"

Larsen did not reply. He lacked Wolf's clinical attitude, and he was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with their quest. They moved on, and the surroundings became damp and glistening as the ramp narrowed to an earth-walled tunnel with a dirt floor. Ahead of them, a slender figure mewled faintly and slithered away with a serpentine motion down another side passage.

Wolf suddenly stopped, and fingered the metal shaft of the tracer he was holding. "Damn it, John, is it my imagination, or is this thing getting hot?"

"Could be. I think the same thing is happening to the gun and the flashlight. I noticed it a few yards back."

"We must have run into an induction field. If it gets any stronger, we won't be able to carry any metal with us. Let's keep going for a few more yards."

They moved on slowly, but it was soon apparent that the field was strengthening. The backed up again for a counsel of war.

"The tracer signal is really strong now, John," said Wolf. "Capman can't be far ahead of us. Let's leave all the metal objects here and scout ahead for another fifty yards. If we don't spot him after that, we'll have to give up."

Both men were feeling the strain. In good light, Wolf would have seen the reaction that his suggestion produced in Larsen. As it was, he heard a very faint assent, and leaving guns, lights and trace sensor behind they went on into the darkness, yard by cautious yard.

Suddenly, Larsen stopped. "Bey." His voice was a faint whisper. "Can you hear something up ahead?"

Wolf strained his ears. He could hear nothing.

"It sounded like a groan, Bey. There, again. Now do you hear it?"

"I think so. Quietly now, and carefully. It's only a few yards in front of us."

The crept on through the musty darkness. They heard another low groan, then heavy and painful breathing. Suddenly, a weak voice reached them through the gloom.

"Who's there? Stay where you are and for God's sake don't come any closer."

"Capman? This is Wolf and Larsen. Where are you?"

"Down here, in the pit. Be careful where you tread. I'll show you in a second."

A thin beam of light appeared, coming from the floor in front of them. They moved hesitantly forward and found themselves standing at the edge of a twelve-foot drop. At the base of it they could see Capman lying helpless, limbs contorted. He was holding a small flashlight and shining it towards them.

"This pit wasn't here a couple of days ago," he said faintly. "It must have been dug by one of the modified forms that live in these tunnels. A big one, I think. It came this way a few minutes ago, then went away again. That way."

He shone the flashlight along the bottom of the pit. They could see a large tunnel running away from the base of it. Capman seemed weak and obviously in pain, but he was still perfectly rational and composed.

"If it survives down here it's probably carnivorous," he said. "I wonder what the basic form is?"

Wolf was astonished to hear a tone of genuine intellectual curiosity in Capman's tone. He advanced closer to the edge and tried to see further

along the tunnel in the pit.

"I don't know what you can do to help me," went on Capman calmly. "If you can't get me out, it's vital that I give my records to you. I should have left them at the hospital. They are a crucial part of the description of the work I've been doing. Make sure they get into the right hands."

He broke off suddenly and swung the light back along the wall of the pit. "I think it's coming back. Here, I'm going to try and throw this spool up to you. Step nearer to the edge. I'm not sure how well I can throw from this position."

Capman shone the flashlight on the wall of the pit, to give a diffuse light above, and threw a small spool awkwardly upward. Reaching far out, almost to the point of over-balancing, Larsen managed to make a snatching, one-handed catch. Capman sighed with relief and pain, and sank back to the dirt floor. They could hear a deep grunting, and a scrambling noise was approaching along the pit tunnel. While they watched in horror, Capman remained astonishingly cool.

"Whatever happens here," he said. "Remeber that your first duty is to get those records back to the hospital. Don't waste any time."

He turned the flashlight again into the pit. In the uncertain light, Wolf and Larsen had an impression of an enormous simian shape, moving toward Capman. Before they could gain a clear view of it, the light fell to the floor and was suddenly extinguished. There was a grinding noise and a bubbling cough from the pit, then silence.

Without another word or a wasted moment, both men turned and sped back through the tunnel. They picked up guns, lights and tracer and continued at full speed through the dark ways of Old City. Not until they were once more in the elevator, rising through Central Hospital to Capman's laboratory, did Larsen finally break the silence.

"I don't know what Capman did in that vault, but whatever it was he paid for it tonight."

Wolf, unusually subdued, could do no more than nod in agreement and add, "Requiescat In Pace."

They went at once to the Transplant Department, where Morris received the precious spool of microfilm. At Wolf's urging, he agreed to have a team assigned to an immediate analysis of it, while they told him of the strange circumstance of its passage to them.

AN HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE, Wolf and Larsen were breakfasting in the visitors' section on the highest floor of Central Hospital. At Morris' insistence they had taken three hours of deep-sleep and spent another hour in programmed stress release. Both men were feeling rested and fit and had accepted a substantial meal from the robo-servers. Before they had finished, Doctor Morris came bustling in. It was clear that he had not slept, but his eyes were bright with excitement. He waved a handful of listings, and sat down opposite them.

"Fantastic," he said. "There's no other word for it. It will take us years to get all the details on this. Capman has gone further in form-change than we dreamed. Every form in that underground lab explores new ground in change experiment."

He began to leaf through the listings. "Here's an anaerobic form," he said. "It can breathe air, as usual, but if necessary it can also break down a variety of other chemicals for life support. It could operate under the sea,

or in a vacuum, or almost anywhere. Here's another one, with a thick and insensitive epidermis—it should be very tolerant of extreme conditions of heat and radiation.

"Then there's this one." Morris waved the listing excitedly. He was unable to remain seated, and began to pace up and down in front of the window, where a pale gleam of false dawn was appearing. "Look, he has a complete photosynthetic system, with chlorophyll pouches on his chest, arms and back. He could survive quite happily in a semi-dormant state on traces of minerals, water and carbon-dioxide. Or he can live quite well as a normal human form, eating normal food.

"Here we have miniaturized forms, only ten inches high when fully adult. They have a normal life expectancy and a normal chromosome and gene structure. They can breed back to full-sized children in a couple of generations."

Wolf was struck by a sudden memory. "Do these forms have any special project names with them?" he asked.

"They do. They are all shown in Capman's general work notes under the heading of Project Proteus, except for one form—and that one has us baffled at the moment. It's the one we were talking about in the lab last night."

He riffled through the listings and came up with one that seemed much more voluminous than the others. "It's the one with the delay loop that occurs all over the program. We have made several efforts to revive the subject, but we can't do it. He seems to be in some kind of catatonic trance, and when we try and calculate the life-ratio on the computer, we get over-flow."

Wolf looked at Morris, and thought of Capman's note to him in the underground vault. Perhaps Capman was right, and Wolf did think in the same way. There was no doubt that he found the intention of the new form obvious, while it had Morris and Larsen baffled.

"Doctor," he said. "Did Capman ever talk to you about the future of the human race—where we will be in a hundred years, for instance?"

"Not to me personally. But his views were well-known. He subscribed to the Dolmetsch Doctrine—without new frontiers, we will stagnate and revert to a lower civilization. The United Space Federation can't prevent that; they are too thinly spread and have too fragile a hold on the environment."

Wolf leaned back and looked at the ceiling. "So doesn't it seem clear what Capman's plan was? We need new frontiers. The U.S.F. can't provide them unless it has assistance. Capman has been working towards a single objective—to provide forms that can be used in space exploration. The forms you've been describing are ideal for working out in space, or on the Moon or Mars—or for terraforming work on Venus."

Morris looked blank. "You're bright. But what about the small ones, or this catatonic one?"

"He's not catatonic. He's asleep. All his vital processes are slowed down, by some pre-set amount. I don't know how much, but you should be able to find out if you look at the delay factor in the bio-feedback program. Capman set up that delay loop so the software could interact with the form-change experiment in its own 'real-time.' "

Morris looked again at the listings in his hand. "Twelve hundred," he said at last. "My God, it's set now for *twelve hundred.* That means

that. . . ."

His voice tailed off.

"It means that he will sleep for one of his 'nights'," said Wolf. "That will be equal to twelve hundred of ours. I expect his life expectancy will be in proportion—twelve hundred times as long. That makes it about a hundred thousand years. Of course, that's not his *subjective* life expectancy—that will be about the same as ours."

"But how do we communicate with him?"

"The same way as Capman did in his form-change programs. You'll have to slow all the stimuli down by a factor of twelve hundred. Feed him information at the same rate as he's programmed to receive it."

"But what's the point of it?" asked Morris. "He can't work in space if he's incapable of communicating with the rest of us."

"New frontiers," said Wolf. "We want new frontiers, right? Don't you see, you've got the ideal form there for interstellar exploration? A trip of a century would only seem about a month to him. If you put a form-change machine on the ship with him, he could be brought back to a normal pace when he got there, for the observation work. Combine him with the miniaturized forms you found, and you've got people who can explore the stars, with the present ships and technology."

"The delay factor is set in the program," said Morris. "There's no reason to think twelve hundred is a limit. I'll have to check, and see how high it could go. Do you think it's possible that the programs would allow him to run *faster* than normal?"

"That's much harder. I don't see how you could speed up nerve signals. But I'm no expert, you need to look at it yourself. But you can see why your computer hit an over-flow situation when you tried to compute a life-ratio. In subjective terms it's still unity, but in terms of an outside observer it's twelve hundred. We need a new definition of life-ratio."

Morris was still pacing the room excitedly, listings crumpled in his hands. "So much that's new. We'll be years evaluating it without Capman. You have no idea, what we lost with his death. I'll have to get back and help the others in the analysis, but none of us has his grasp of fundamentals. It's a gap that can't be filled."

He seemed to have recovered from his earlier shock at discovering that Capman was using human subjects. The potential of the new forms drove all else from his mind. As he turned to leave, Wolf asked him a final question.

"Did the catatonic experiment have any special project name?"

Morris nodded. "Project Timeset—of course, that makes perfect sense now. I must check out how big the delay factor can be become. I see no reason why it couldn't be ten thousand or more. Can you imagine a man who could live for a million years?"

He hurried out, and his departure took the energy and excitement from the room. After a few seconds, Wolf stood up and went over to the window. It faced out across Old City, towards the coming dawn. He looked at the dark, sprawling bulk of the city beneath him in silence.

"Cheer up, Bey," said Larsen after a couple of minutes. "Capman's death is still eating you up, isn't it? We couldn't have done a thing to help him. And I don't think we should judge him. That's for the future. He did a terrible thing, but now he's paid for it with his life. It's no good you

brooding on it, too."

Bey turned slowly from the window, his eyes reflective and introspective. "That's not what's worrying me, John," he replied. "I'm troubled by something a lot less abstract. It's hard for me to believe that a man could be as smart as Capman, and yet die so stupidly."

Larsen shrugged. "Everybody has their blind spots, Bey. Nobody's all smart."

"But Capman told us that he knew he might be discovered, all along. He didn't know when it might be, but he had to allow for it. He set up elaborate checks, to see if anyone was about to discover what he was doing, and when he found we were onto him, he got ready to disappear."

"That's just what he did," agreed Larsen. "He was all set to disappear, but he didn't allow for that monster's trap, over in Old City."

Wolf was shaking his head. "John, Robert Capman allowed for *everything*. I don't believe he'd fall into a trap like that. We are the ones who fell into the trap. Don't you see, everything that happened was designed to draw us to pursue him? He knew we would try and follow him—we had to. All that talk about disappearance and a quiet life was nonsense. He *expected* to be followed."

"Maybe he did, Bey. But he didn't expect that illegal form in the tunnel."

"Didn't he, John? He wanted the trail followed while it was hot—just the two of us, without a lot of special equipment, and with no preparation. So like a pair of dumb heroes, we rushed in.

"We should have been suspicious as soon as we ran into that induction field. Who'd have set up such a thing—and why? Somebody wanted us to get to Capman without lights or guns. So, sure enough, Larsen and Wolf arrive on the scene without lights and guns."

"But we saw the monster form, Bey, and we saw Capman killed."

Wolf looked at Larsen sceptically. "Did we? Did we really? What did we actually *see*? A big, vague form, then the light went out. We imagined all the rest. We didn't really see one thing. We ran. When was the last time you ran away from something, in a blind panic?"

Larsen nodded. "I'm not proud of that, Bey. I haven't run from anything for a long time. I don't know what got hold of us."

"I do. We ran away, but we had a little assistance. I'll bet there was a subsonic projector and a few other items near that pit—all set up to scare the hell out of us as soon as we had the spool of micro-film. Capman told us, twice, that we had to get that back to the hospital—so we could justify running away to ourselves. Capman says he forgot to leave that at the hospital—when all the people here say he never forgot *anything*, no matter how small a detail.

"John, it was a set-up. Capman is no more dead than I am."

Larsen was silent for a couple of minutes, digesting what Wolf had told him. Finally he too came to the window and looked out. "So you think that he is alive out there. How can we prove it?"

"That's the hellish part of it. We can't. No one would believe the bits and pieces that I've told you. If we just report the facts, Capman will be declared dead. There will be no more pursuit. He's free now in a way that he could never have been if we hadn't followed him."

Larsen frowned. "It's still hard to

accept, Bey. He lived for his work. Now it's over. What would he do with his life?"

Bey looked at him quizzically. "Is it over, John? Remember, there were twenty tanks in that vault, and fourteen of them were occupied. What about the experiments that were in the other six tanks? We've accounted for Project Proteus and Project Timeset. What about the other two I found, Project Amphisbaena and Project Lungfish? What were they, and where did they go?

"I think Robert Capman has another laboratory somewhere. He has those other six experiments with him there, and he's still working. You can bet that those are the six most interesting forms, too."

"Do you think the lab is in Old City, Bey?"

"Maybe, but I think not. Capman told the Building Committee at the hospital that he should have twenty more working years. He's found a place where he can work quietly—want to speculate on the forms that he will create in that time? I don't think Old City will be safe enough for that work."

"Even if he's not there, Bey, we have to check it out and make sure." Larsen stood up. "Let me go and file a report. I'll request that we send a search party back along the way we went last night. Maybe we can pick up some clues there."

He left, leaving Bey Wolf alone in the long room. On impulse, he switched off the lights and went again to the window overlooking the city.

Search if you want, John, he thought. I'm pretty sure you won't find any signs of Robert Capman. What did his message to me say? 'It will be necessary for Robert Capman to vanish from the Earth.' I'm inclined to take that quite literally.

So where does that leave me? Let down again—the old sense of disappointment? I don't think so. I have to take it one step further. If Robert Capman is what I think he is—and if I am what he thinks I am—then I must assume that Capman expected me to see through his 'death'. What does he expect me to do now? He told me that already—learn more theory of form-change, his message said. He must have had a reason for suggesting that—and I think it was more than just general advice.

Capman was experimenting with human children, monstrously. Capman was a great humanitarian, who cared for individuals more than most people. Those two statements are not consistent. What was Capman *really* doing in his experiments? I don't know, and he doesn't want to tell. But I think we haven't got anything like the whole story yet—and it may be a long time before we do. When the time for that explanation arrives, I want to be prepared to understand it.

I feel like a man who's been given a brief look at the Promised Land. What I'd really like to be doing is working with Capman, wherever he is; exploring the new forms—a whole, unknown world of changes.

Wolf's thoughts ran on, drifting, speculating on when and how he would next meet with Robert Capman. The first rays of the coming dawn were striking through the window, high in the hospital. Below, still hidden in darkness, lay the forbidding mass of Old City. Behrooz Wolf watched in silence until the new day had advanced into the streets below, then he turned and left the room.

—CHARLES SHEFFIELD

Voted Most Popular Author by the readership of If *magazine and long a favorite in* Analog, *Mack Reynolds makes one of his rare appearances here with an intriguing look at a very possible future . . .*

ALL THINGS TO ALL . . .

MACK REYNOLDS

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

"LOOK SISTER," the Pit said around his cigarette, "button up your lip, see?" His own lips had hardly moved in speaking.

"I beg your pardon?" Maureen Kingsley said.

"You heard me, sister. Give a broad a chance and she'll talk your lug off."

Maureen glared at him. "What're you working on now?" she snapped. "You sound as though you're planning a robbery."

"A romp," he bit out. "A caper. And that's exactly what I'm planning."

She shook her head in despair. "Zoroaster! I guess I'm lucky you've never done a piece on a sex deviate. What is it this time, another story? Fiction?"

"Well . . .yes." Pitt Day finished his coffee and let his face, which had been bent into a half sneer, resume its more natural, worriedly-anxious lines. "There's this old time gangster, understand, Mo? He's in rebellion against the Ultra-welfare State. Kind of the last of the free enterprisers, see?"

"Free enterprisers," she snorted. "A gangster."

"Well, you know what I mean." He came to his feet and started pacing the tiny apartment as he talked, and, as he went on, the pacing became a prowling, his eyes narrowed again, and his mouth fell into a loose half-snarl which would have done a Humphrey Bogart of yesteryear proud. His right hand slipped unconsciously beneath the left lapel of his jacket. "He's stymied, see?" he growled. "The coming of the Universal Credit Card makes an old time romp practically impossible. So The Pit . . ."

"The Pit?" she protested. "Pithy, you're getting yourself all worked up into this again. You'd better look out or you'll be walking along the street and get picked up by the police."

"The fuzz," he muttered. "We call them fuzz, or coppers, Mo. Anyway . . ."

"Save me," she said. "I haven't time to hear it all. When will you learn? Short stories are through. Who reads any more, with Tri-Vision?"

Pitt Day slipped out of character again. "Well, darn it, there's still *some* being published, Mo."

Maureen shook her head. "My grandfather told me once that in the old days there were flocks of magazines carrying nothing stories. Pulps they called them. Even the most popular magazines like the

Saturday Evening Post used to have, say, six or seven short stories, a novelette and a serial, then possibly one article. Now, such magazines as are left at all, carry practically nothing but articles. Fiction is through."

"Fiction will never be through." Pitt said.

She shighed. "I mean printed fiction. It was the beginning of the end when radio came in. Television made it worse, but now with Tri-Vision practically nobody reads. You have to think to read. You have to use imagination to get what the writer is putting over. But with Tri-Vision you can *see* it. If a writer in a story tells you the girl is pretty, with red hair and blue eyes and a curvy figure, you have to go to the effort of picturing her in your mind, from his written words. But Tri-Vision. . . ?" She shook her head. "Forget about writing fiction, Pithy."

He grunted disgust and made a motion with his hand that encompassed the auto-mini-apartment in which they sat. "There has to be some way of getting out of this. Maybe I made a mistake to pick writing, but there must be some way."

Maureen leaned slightly toward him. "Look, Pithy, why don't we get married? As it is now, you have your mini-apartment, I have mine. Duplicate expense. If we were married, we could combine our Inalienable Basic shares, then . . . well, then if we could file for a child and it went through, we'd have another ten shares. Pithy, with thirty shares of Inalienable Basic—gosh, imagine if we had twins—our standard of living wouldn't be half bad."

"Yes it would That's exactly what it'd be, Mo. Half bad. Sure, we'd have three sets of Inalienable Basic, but then we'd have three mouths to

feed. You don't beat the rap much with larger family groups. You have to pay more rent for more space, you pay more for food, more for clothing, more for everything. It's not the way, Mo."

"What *is* the way?" she said in irritation.

"Working. Accumulating some shares of Variable Basic, or shares in private concerns."

She snorted sour amusement. "Sure. When I was still in school I devoted the last few years to becoming a stenographer. Great. By the time I graduated, voco-typers had come in. Over night they cut the number of stenographers in the country in half. No job for Maureen Kingsley."

"Well, you could take some more courses. Learn to be a supervisor of voco-typers."

"Sure. And after studying that for another two or three years by the time I graduated there'd be such advances in voco-typers that supervisors would be ultra-mationed out."

"Well, I'm different. They'll never dispense with the writer any more than they will the artist or musician."

In disgust, she began to dial herself another cup of coffee on the auto-chef table about which they sat, but then she pulled herself up. "I'd better watch my credit balance. It's getting near the end of the month."

She looked at him. "Pithy, come off it. Be realistic. The arts are being ultra-mationed out as fast as anything else. Musicians! Ha. The phonograph was their first kiss of death. Now we've got to the point where one band of musicians can entertain a billion people at once." She snorted. "Writers? A writer today can turn out a Tri-Vision, hour program, the equivalent of a novelette in the old days, and two billion people will eventually see it. So how many writers are actually needed? Artists? With the new duplicators, nobody buys originals any more except wealthy collectors. But who cares? You can't tell the original from the copy. One painting, registered by the distributors, will hang in a million different homes."

Irritated, he checked the teevee phone for the time, then said, "How about another cup of coffee, on me?"

"Can you afford it? You were going to have me over for dinner tomorrow."

Still irritated, he put his credit card on the teevee screen and said, "Balance check, please." Within seconds, a robot voice said, "Then shares, Inalienable Basic. One share, Variable Basic, value as of ten o'clock this morning, four thousand, one hundred and sixteen dollars and thirty-one cents. Current cash credit, fourteen dollars and twelve cents."

"Oh, oh," Pitt Day muttered. "How many more days in this month? Six? I guess I'd better take it easy. I might have to take somebody to lunch, or something."

Maureen looked at him quizzically. "Pithy, where'd you ever acquire that share of Variable Basic?"

He scowled at her. "Don't call me Pithy, confound it. I hate that name. Suppose I told you I'd earned it with my writing."

"I wouldn't believe you." She cocked her head critically. "But you *look* as though your name is something like Pithy. What in the world makes a woman fall in love with a man?"

He grunted deprecation. "Actually, I inherited it from my mother."

"Oh?" Maureen was mildly surprised. "Where did she get it? I'm amazed she didn't have it converted

into cash and blow it."

He came to his feet. "She inherited it from her parents. I better be going."

Maureen stood too, wearily. "There's an example of what we were arguing about. Three generations of the Ultra-welfare State and you've acquired exactly one share of Variable Basic stock to supplement the ten shares of Inalienable Basic you were given at birth. How long's it going to take you to get rich, Pithy?"

"I don't know."

"What's doing today?"

"I'm going to see Bruster, over at the Press Syndicate."

"Bruster?"

"Sam Bruster. He's head of the columnists division."

"I thought you were hot on fiction these days. What does he want with you?"

"I don't know. A long time ago, in school, I did him a favor. I've been roaching him recently but thus far he hasn't been able to come up with anything."

2.

DOWN ON the street, Pitt Day hesitated over taking the vacuum tube or a floater cab. It was his current cash credit balance that was decisive. He hated the claustrophobic feeling, the stomach sinking sensation of the vacuum tube vehicle. The larger, public ones weren't impossibly bad, but when you wedged into a two-seater, say, to shuttle to a final destination, such as your home, an office, or a hotel, then it irritated the living Zoroaster out of him.

But a floater was too expensive, especially for the distance involved. The Press Syndicate buildings were half way across the pseudo-town, a good fifty kilometers.

He strolled on down to the nearest vacuum tube terminal, stared up for a moment at the wall map, and located the nearest terminal to the Press Syndicate complex and the easiest route to it. He put his Uni-Credit card into the appropriate slot, winning admission, and waited for the first twenty seater to stop here. It disgorged several passengers and he entered.

When the vacuum door closed, hissing pressurization, he took a deep breath in anticipation of the shot. The kid next to him giggled. Well, let him have his amusement. The youngster was born to this means of transportation, he, Pitt Day, had to get used to it. *If* he was used to it. Some old timers wouldn't get into a vacuum tube vehicle for love or money, and he didn't blame them.

The vehicle reached maximum speed in moments, and fell off immediately.

The door hissed open and Pitt got out with a sigh. He wondered vaguely how many people each year had their necks broken or their spines snapped in the sudden accelerations and decelerations.

It was still several kilometers to his final destination so he got into a two-seater, with another sigh, brought down the canopy and dropped the pressurizer. He stuck his credit card in the slot and dialed the reception office of Sam Bruster at the Press Syndicate.

As always, he tensed as he felt the sinking sensation that involved dropping to tube level. For a minute or two, his metal cacoon shuttled back and forth preparatory to the shot, then hesitated momentarily. He sucked in air, then sank slowly back into the acceleration chair. In moments, the direction of pressure was

reversed and then the shuttling began again.

Finally, the green light on the dash flickered, and he threw back the canopy and stepped into the office beyond, muttering, "I wonder what it was like to ride a horse."

Sam Bruster's rank wasn't such as to rate that anachronism, a live receptionist. Pitt approached the reception desk and said into the screen there, "Pitt Day to see Mr. Bruster, on appointment."

The screen lit up and Sam's chunky face was there. "Come on in, Pitt," he said.

Pitt knew the way. More than once, he had been in here trying to roach old Sam into some kind of a paying job. Not that he'd had much in the way of luck. Sam Bruster was fortunate to hold down his own job and augument his Inalienable Basic income.

The heavy-set man came to his feet long enough to shake hands, which was a passingly good sign in itself. He usually had some immediate excuse for brushing Pitt off.

He settled himself back behind his bank of screens and came to the point immediately. "Pitt, how'd you like to write a couple of columns or so for the chain?"

Pitt Day sank back into a chair, a feeling of utter disbelief washing over him. "Columns?"

The other held up a chubby hand. "Oh, don't misunderstand. I don't mean permanently."

"Oh . . ."

Bruster leaned back in his swivel comfort chair. "I haven't any doubt that you can handle it. You were always top man in school in journalism, creative writing, and such. Editor of the school paper, so forth and so on. Sorry it's not up to me to give you something permanent, but you know how it is."

Pitt said sourly, "How is it?"

Sam was slightly irritated. "Pitt, as far back as the middle of the century the high schools, colleges and universities were turning out journalist and creative writing graduates by the tens of thousands." He grunted deprecation. "I was reading some figures the other day going back to 1950. At any given time they estimated that there were approximately one thousand persons making their living at free lance writing. You know, short story writers, novelists, free lance contributors of articles to magazines, that sort of thing. At the same time, at any given period, approximately one million persons were trying to break into the field. Zoroaster only knows why, given the pay. I suppose it's a matter of ego-boo. Free lance writers live forever; I doubt if there was room in the industry for fifty new ones a year. The University of California alone must have turned out several hundred annually. How in the hell, did they expect all to break in? I'm not even mentioning journalism students. While newspapers were folding up, or amalgamating all over the place, throwing old time pros out of work, the journalism schools were producing fervent, would-be newspapermen by the scores of thousands."

Pitt Day said sourly, "I know, I know. Is this supposed to be news to me? I'm one of the few who still are trying to stick it out. What's this about a column, Sam?"

The other became strictly businesslike. "Pitt, are you acquainted with Cordwainer Abner's column?"

"Lot of politics, isn't it? Actually, no. I'm not really a great newspaper reader, Sam. When newspapers stopped running news and began to

be just one big thickness of editorial opinion, disguised as news, columnists, features, sports, comics and advertising, I largely called it quits."

Sam said, "What did you expect? With the coming of radio, then TV and finally Tri-Vision how could any newspaper compete in spot news? Why read about such things as the Asian War when you could tune in on the TV coverage and see the real gore? Why, as far back as when I was a boy, there was actually more space devoted to columnists than to international and national news, more space devoted comic strips than columnists, and news put together, and more devoted to advertising than all three combined."

Pitt was becoming more depressed by the minute. This seemed less and less promising. However, he held his peace.

Sam said, "This is the fling. Next year, the election is upon us. Everybody in the industry is trying to come up with some original ideas on coverage. Ha!" He snorted in disgust. "At any rate, one of the bigwigs decided one new departure might be a series on the men behind the politicians."

"Come again?" Pitt said.

"Simple enough. The institution goes as far back as the history of politics. It's just been accelerating the past few decades. It was possible for a Lincoln to do his own thinking, largely map out his own platform, write his own speeches, and be elected." Sam Bruster grunted fatly. "No more."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that if Lincoln were to run today, he'd never make it. In spite of the fact that we're now used to that face of his—since his being all but sainted—he was one of the ugliest and gawkiest men in the history of the country. The fact that he was also one of the brainiest and was honest and of the highest principle is beside the point. He'd never make it. He wasn't pretty enough. There's a lot of other presidents, both good and bad, who wouldn't have made it if the electorate could ever have seen them on TV or Tri-Vision. Take Taft, who was one of the fattest slobs of his time. Hell, some of them wouldn't have made it if they'd been *heard* by the whole electorate on radio. Teddy Roosevelt had a terrible voice."

Pitt Day was scowling at him, so Sam Bruster went further into it. "More recently, we've given up brains, integrity and principle and substituted public image as the requirement for high office. As far back as the middle of the century, we had one president who used to run the red light district of a middle western city for the local political czar. The political boss never bothered to hold high office himself, and finally wound up in prison for tax evasion and various other charges. But his protege, though never much of a brain, had a *homey* something about him that projected itself to the electorate. One of the first things he did upon attaining the White House was to fire the federal judge who had jailed his boss."

"All right," Pitt said. "I suppose I know some other examples. But where do I come in?"

"We're going to do a series of columns on the men behind the current big-name politicians. The brains behind the thrones, the real sources of party policy. The men who decide upon the platforms that the public image boys supposedly stand upon."

Pitt was disgusted. "Darn it," he said. "I don't know anything about such matters, Sam."

The other nodded. "I know. That's one of the reasons we picked you."

Pitt looked at him.

"Fresh approach," Sam Bruster explained. "You go in cold, you come out with new angles." He picked up a paper from his desk and stared at it grumpily. "There are actually three political groups in the country today, Conservative, Liberal and the smaller so-called Futurist Party. Which one would you like to cover?"

"I get my pick?"

"Ummm. For old time's sake, I thought I'd let you take your choice. The other boys can take what's left over."

"I thought you said Cordwainer Abner was scheduled for the series."

"He took sick. You'll be his guest columnist."

Something came to Pitt Day. "Sam, what's in this for me?"

"You know the deal. It's all on a pro-rata basis, like any columnist. It's all according to how many outlets take the column, and then how many readers read the paper on their teevee-phone screens. You'll have a few dollars added to your credit balance."

Pitt leaned forward earnestly. "Look, Sam, why don't I do the whole series? Maybe for a flat amount. Say, one share of Variable Basic to deposit to my, uh, portfolio."

The other's eyebrows went up. "We were thinking of three different columnists, Pitt."

"I could do the whole series and use three different by-lines. Nobody knows my name, anyway, and I suppose the other fellows you had in mind would be equally unknown."

"What advantage would there be in it for us, that way?" Bruster frowned.

Pitt went into his fling. "For one thing, you wouldn't be dealing with three men in all, any one of which might foul it up for you. You'd save time, dealing with just one man. Besides, to manage this at all, I'll have to do quite a bit of research. Researching one political movement will automatically involve lapping over into the others, for comparison and so forth. In looking over, say, the Liberals, I'll automatically be picking up contrast material on the Conservatives and this, uh, Futurist Party."

Sam thought about it, scowling.

Pitt said, "At least you could give it a try."

Sam thought about it some more. He said slowly, "I wouldn't mind being able to handle the whole operation dealing with just one writer."

Pitt came to his feet. "Great. Suppose I start right in?"

"Now wait a minute. I'll tell you what I'll do. For the time, I won't approach anybody else. You start off on Steve Devlin."

"Devlin?"

"He's the party theoretician of the Liberals. Year in, year out, he supplies the brains behind those liberal politician cloddies, they manage to wind up with as their supposed standard bearers."

"And. . . ?"

"Do an article or two on him. If they come out well . . . well then, fine. We'll talk over you taking on the other columns under different pseudonyms. If you flunk out, then I'll look up somebody else."

"Right, Sam. You won't be sorry."

He made his goodbyes as brief as possible, before the syndicate official could change his mind, and got out of there, his head in a swirl.

A share of Variable Basic! His first step up the rungs of the ladder of People's Capitalism, the Ultra-welfare State of the United States of the Americas.

3.

BACK IN the reception room, he decided against taking a vacuum tube vehicle to . . . to wherever he had to go next. He didn't know where he was going next. Back to Mo, to tell her the good news? To the library, to begin the research into the Liberals and Steve Devlin? Immediately to Steve Devlin's residence to start things moving? To the morgue of the *New York and Los Angeles Times?*

He took the elevator to the street and, his mind still in an euphoristic haze, started walking.

"Pundit," he murmered his back straight. "Political commentator." His face took on an intellectual expression, one of piercing intellectual curiosity, albeit there was a certain questioning, dubious element there as well. Obviously, Columnist Pitt Day was not easily sucked in.

He murmured, under his breath, "Now then, Mr. President, your position on Common Eur-Asia. . . . ?"

A floater pulled up to the sidewalk and two very well dressed young men emerged. Pitt, taken up with his own mental peregrinations, failed to notice them until they had taken up positions to each side of him as he walked. Then, in mild surprise, he blinked.

The one on the right said gently, "Mr. Day, isn't it?"

"Why . . . yes, that's right."

The other one said, "Taking over the Cordwainer Abner column for awhile, eh?"

Pitt Day came to a halt and looked at him, then at his companion. They were strangely similar in both clothing and physical make-up. "How could you possibly know already?"

The first one said gently, "Mr. Day, it's our job to know. Now then, do you know what happened to poor Mr. Abner?"

4.

"POOR Mr. Abner?" Pitt Day repeated, blankly.

"That's right, poor Mr. Abner." The very well dressed young man emphazied the *poor.*

"Well, no," Pitt said. "I don't know what happened to him."

"What do you say we drop in here at this bar and have a drink while we explain what happened to poor Cordwainer Abner?"

He could have run for it, Pitt Day assumed. But why? He was in a public place. And the bar would still be a public place. He was safe enough—wasn't he? Besides, now that they brought it up, he was intrigued by what had happened to the columnist he was replacing. What had Sam Bruster said? Abner had taken sick. That could mean almost anything.

"All right," Pitt said.

The one on the left took him firmly by the arm and guided him through the airconditioning curtain into the bar.

They took a corner table and one of the prosperous looking young men said, "I'm—let's say—Bert and this is Al. Now, what'll you have to drink, Mr. Day? Scotch all right?"

"Scotch? Are you kidding? You know Central Production discontinued the use of cereals for beverages years ago."

The one called Bert put his credit card in the slot of the auto-bar and dialed. "Mr. Day," he said, "even under People's Capitalism they who have sufficient dollar credits can buy just about anything. You just have to know who and where to dial."

The table top sank down, to return shortly with three tall glasses. It had been years since Pitt Day had tasted whiskey. More years still since he had tasted Scotch whiskey. He had *never*

tasted twenty year old Scotch whisky. Pitt Day was impressed.

He felt expansive. This was more like it. He could see the advantages of being a political columnist. A pundit. His keen, intellectual expression came over his face again. "Now then," he said, importantly, "what can I do for you boys?"

The one named Al said gently, "Mr. Day, have you ever heard of the Mafia?"

The other said, more gently still, "Or possibly the Cosa Nostra?"

Pitt Day caught himself from coughing his precious Scotch out over the auto-bar table. He managed to get out, "Well, yes. In my time I've written a bit of crime fiction."

Bert said, "But we're not talking about crime fiction, Mr. Day."

Al said, "Mr. Day, it's a long story, but I'll sum it up for you. In the old days, ah, extra-legal enterprise was allowed to remain in the hands of illiterate immigrants, let's say. Rather rugged types, largely from Sicily and Naples. A classic example was Mr. Alphonso Capone, of Chicago. However, Mr. Day, as time marched on such uncouth types no longer filled the bill. In fact, various elements of the population were distressed by not only their activities, but, indeed, their public image, as the expression goes. Thus it was that Mr. Charles Luciano, who came later, had already evolved into a rather soft-spoken, well groomed, comparative gentleman."

"Lucky Luciano," Pitt blurted.

Al ignored him. "However, this was but the beginning. For a time, these extra-legal enterprise gentlemen thought it would be enough to send their children to secure suitable degrees in the universities. But it wasn't. You see, Mr. Day, when finance becomes sizeable enough it knows no nationality. In fact, today our central headquarters are in Satellite City." He made a gesture upward. "And many lands are represented. Some of the activities originally in the hands of the Cosa Nostra became far too lucrative to remain in the control of inadequate second generation immigrants. A classic example was Las Vegas, in the old days. When it consisted of a few gambling spots, profiting to the extent of a few millions a year, then it remained in the hands of professional gamblers and disreputable elements. However, when the area began to develop into one of the great resorts of the world and to involve hundreds of millions in resources, then more sophisticated elements moved in and the uncouth gentlemen were eased out."

Pitt said plaintively, "What's all this got to do with me and with Cordwainer Abner's column?"

"Have another whisky-soda," Bert said, dialling.

Al said, "Mr. Day, at the present time, extra-legal activities in the United States of the Americas have run into certain difficulties. With the discontinuing of currency as a means of exchange, and the advent of the Universal Credit Card, various enterprises have been, shall we say, distressed."

"I can imagine," Pitt snorted, taking up the new glass. "Why knock over a bank if there's no money in it?"

Bert sighed. "Mr. Day, long before the development of the Ultra-welfare State, the elements we represent discontinued such enterprises as, ah, knocking over banks."

Al said, "However, we would be distressed indeed if People's Capitalism continues to evolve along its present path. There are some ele-

ments in the land who would like to limit the free enterprise remaining still further." He shook his head. "Mr. Day, we would take a very dim view of any political party save the Conservatives coming into office next year."

Pitt Day looked from one of them to the other, truly mystified. "I still don't know what this has got to do with me."

"Mr. Day," Al said, "you are but a very small element. However, the whole picture is made up of very small elements, hundreds and even thousands of small elements. Our interests are wide enough to embrace them all, or, at least all that we *can* influence."

Bert said, "Few people realize the extent of the behind the scenes maneuvering in major politics. Let me give you an example, Mr. Day. As far back as the Second War, a group of the country's industrialists decided that a certain lieutenant-colonel was potential political material. They brought pressure to bear and shortly he was promoted over the heads of literally scores of career officers superior in both experience and ability, until he held the highest rank. So far as his true abilities were concerned, his once commanding officer, General MacArthur, said of him, in contempt, 'The best filing clerk I ever had.' And his biographer, a chap a bit addicted to strong drink, once said, 'He would have made a fine top sergeant.'

"When the war ended, his backers decided he needed still more prestige and swung arrangements for him to take a very big job in the reshuffling and rearranging of Europe. But even that wasn't enough, so they found him a job as president of one of the country's largest universities. Once again, as an example of his true abilities, when the reporters came around and asked him what he knew about education, he replied, 'Nothing. They'll have to brief me on it.' When another reporter asked him his taste in reading material, he was informed that our hero hadn't read a book in fourteen years. When still another reporter asked him what newspapers he preferred, he said he never read the newspapers, that '. . . whenever anything important happens they tell me about it.' The flabbergasted reporters didn't get around to asking him who *they* were."

Bert wound it up. "It was more than ten years, Mr. Day, from when our group of industrialists first decided that our hero's qualities were such that they could make him their figure-head in the highest office of the nation. But they could wait. The stakes were high enough."

Al took over again. "Suffice to say, Mr. Day, that the elements we represent also have fabulous resources, and are willing to work in the smallest detail from our base in Satellite City. Mr. Day, I am afraid we would be very unhappy with you, if other than the Conservatives were to be elected next year."

"What can *I* do about it?" Pitt wailed suddenly.

Al and Bert stood and looked down at him. Beamed down at him, might be the better term.

Al said, "We are sure you'll be doing every little thing you can, Mr. Day. It's unfortunate that Mr. Abner was so uncooperative. We'll be reading your columns, Mr. Day."

They turned and strode quietly from the bar, leaving Pitt sitting there, staring after them.

"They're bluffing," he muttered, in absolute disbelief at his own words.

5.

THE SECRETARY led him from the entry hall where the vacuum-tube two seater had brought him, down a hallway to Steven Devlin's escape room.

The intellectual head of the Liberal Party was seated there, a book in his hands. It wasn't often you saw a book any more. Pitt Day was impressed and made a mental note to get himself a book or two to leave around his mini-apartment. Very impressive. A real book. The sort of thing a political pundit could be expected to have on hand. None of this dialing the library-banks and having the pages of whatever book you wanted thrown on the screen of your teevee-phone. Status symbol, that's what. Very intellectual.

The secretary was saying, "Sir, this is Mr. Pitt Day, from the Press Syndicate. You'll recall that Mr. Bruster phoned about him."

Devlin marked his place and put the book down on a small table next to his auto-comfort-chair. Evidently, he'd actually been reading, Pitt decided, in surprise. It wasn't just a prop. The older man stood and extended a hand.

"A pleasure, Mr. Day." Then to the secretary, "That'll be all, Micheal."

"Yes, sir," the secretary said and made himself scarce.

Steve Devlin was in his late middle years and evidently non-conformist enough to wear spectacles and an old fashioned tie rather than the Byron-revival cravat that was currently the mode. He also evidently held no brief for restoring hair, since his forehead was so high that he was obviously partially bald. Practically an exhibitionist, Pitt decided.

"Sit down, Mr. Day," Devlin said. "There, that chair is one of my favorites." There was a warm quality in him, and he was obviously ever at ease. "I don't believe we've met before. I thought I knew most of the boys."

Pitt sat and said, "Well, sir, evidently Sam Bruster has deliberately chosen somebody from outside the field for this series. Somebody as ignorant of political economy as he could find. That's me."

The party theoretician chuckled as though Pitt's words were inordinarily clever.

"I suppose that would have its advantages. No preconceived ideas." He thought about it, a slight smile on his face. "When you are as close to socio-economics as I am, it's hard to realize that there are highly intelligent people who have very little interest in the subject at all."

Pitt said earnestly, "Oh, I wouldn't say I had no interest at all. I'm just no authority."

Steve Devlin smiled his slight smile again. "I sometimes wonder if there are any authorities in this field. Too early for a drink, I suppose?"

It wasn't, with someone else buying, but without branding himself as a morning-lush, Pitt Day could hardly say so. "Not for me," he said.

The other said, "If I understand your assignment, what you want is material on the Liberal Party . . ."

"And particularly on you, yourself, and your basic ideas, Mr. Devlin."

". . . ummm, and our long term program."

"Yes, sir," Pitt said earnestly. He brought a recorder from his jacket pocket and activated it.

"Oh, let's not tape this, as yet," Devlin said. "Suppose we just go over things informally for background."

Pitt put the recorder back into his pocket.

Devlin said, "Suppose I assume you

know nothing whatsoever about recent socio-economic developments, as though you were the proverbial man from Mars. And I'll start out from the most basic beginnings—as I see them, of course."

That was all right with Pitt Day. As a matter of fact, for all practical purposes that was where he did stand. Politics and economics bored him spitless.

"We didn't know it at the time," Devlin said slowly, "but I suppose the roots of People's Capitalism, of the Ultra-welfare State, were actually in the gold crisis back in the middle of the century. That period, not too long after the Second War, when the gold reserves of the country were melting away due to America's over-extention of her foreign commitments."

Pitt nodded confirmation, frowning intelligently. "Yes, sir. I suppose that's when I'd put it, all right."

"Yes. It was a rather ridiculous situation. Gold as a medium of exchange was already an anachronism. Not that it wasn't as suited as ever as a standard of value, but there simply wasn't enough of it to back the amount of currency necessary for the world's needs."

"There certainly wasn't," Pitt admitted.

"In the late 1960s," Devlin went on, nodding, "the economy was operating at a rate pushing a trillion dollars a year, but there was only some twelve billion dollars worth of gold left in Fort Knox. It got to the point where foreign countries held more than thirty-five billion paper dollars, supposedly backed by the twelve billion. But the law demanded that ten billion of the bullion be reserved to back American paper currency. In other words, little more than two billion dollars in gold was in Fort Knox to back the thirty-five billion held abroad."

"Fantastic," Pitt snorted, in support.

Devlin made a gesture with his two hands, as though giving up. "At that time, the Federal government alone had a yearly budget of almost two hundred billion. It was ridiculous. The total value of all property in the United States amounted to trillions of dollars, but the currency was based on the insignificant amount of twelve billion. Why, there were many corporations in the United States at that time that were worth considerably more than the gold in Fort Knox. International finance, international trade, international enterprises of every type were threatened with collapse because of this ludicrous situation."

"Ludicrous is right!" Pitt Day confirmed.

"The answer," Devlin said, "is obvious enough now, but it was no joke then. In those days, the greater part of the corporate wealth of the country was in the hands of approximately one hundred giant corporations. Contrary to the belief of some, taxes are levied on wealth, not on poverty. Those one hundred corporations, sooner or later, paid one tremendous percentage of the nation's taxes, which at that time were, counting federal, state and local levies, much more than two hundred billion annually.

"Very well. That first year, the Federal government took in payment of taxes, common stock of the corporations involved, to the extent of ten percent of taxes due. The Federal government was now partial owner of the hundred largest corporations of the land. It amalgamated this stock into what amounted to a gigantic mutual fund which was originally

called United States Basic Common, and issued shares which were put on the world market. Dividends, of course, were based on the earnings of the one hundred corporations, and increased in good times, and went down during recessions. The value of the stock was determined daily by the computers which were fed the quotations from every recognized bourse in the world.

"From the beginning, the Federal government used this United States Basic as a backing of dollars both in the national boundries and abroad. Any country which held dollars and wished to turn them in, could demand, and get, shares of United States Basic Common, at whatever the world price currently might be."

"Right!" Pitt said. "The dollar was backed by the wealth of America."

"That it was," Devlin affirmed. "And that was the first step in the creating of People's Capitalism. From then on, each year that passed, the Federal government continued to take ten percent of its taxes from the one hundred largest corporations, in the form of common stock from those concerns. In no time at all, obviously, it held one tremendous amount of property in this gigantic mutual fund. The dividends, of course, became part of the Federal income and for the first time in many decades, the national debt was actually reduced somewhat."

"A great milestone!" Pitt Day said in mounting enthusiasm.

"Indeed. And it was then the second step was taken. Once again, obvious today, but the way had to be slowly searched out then. At that time there was agitation for poverty relief, bigger pensions, more Social Security, funds for free medical care, subsidation of education—I could go on and on. There was also agitation for a guaranteed annual wage and increased unemployment insurance. And, as automation gave way to ultra-mation, and unemployment grew, the demands became greater. Some authorities actually feared revolution."

Steve Devlin tossed his head in amused memory. "The issuing of Inalienable Basic, based on the stock held by the Federal government was an obvious thing. In one fell swoop it welded into one most of the pensions, the unemployment insurance, the relief and all the rest. From womb to tomb, everyone in the country was insured a basic living. First five, but now ten shares of Inalienable Basic was issued to every child at birth. He cannot sell it, trade it, give it away, or in any other manner dispose of it. It is truly inalienable. Upon each person's death, his ten shares of Inalienable Basic revert to the nation. His heirs cannot inherit it. Each month, the dividends that accrue are deposited to the owner's credit account and, utilizing his Universal Credit Card, he, and he alone, can spend those dollars. Barring children, of course. Parents take care of their Inalienable Basic until the age of eighteen."

"Right!" Pitt exclaimed. "And the more the economy grows, the bigger the dividends get."

"Correct. And today, what was originally United States Basic Common has become Inalienable Basic, issued to each citizen, and Variable Basic which backs the dollar and which is continually placed on the market by the government to help pay its bills. Anyone can acquire Variable Basic, it can be bought and sold, and left to one's heirs."

"Right!" Pitt affirmed.

Steve Devlin paused for a moment. "So much for background, Mr. Day.

We arrive now at the present and the program of the Liberal Party for next year."

"Good," Pitt said. "We Liberals are going to need a strong platform this election."

"Yes, of course. And this is it. Ten shares of Inalienable Basic is not sufficient to maintain the citizens of a nation as wealthy as this. Our program will involve the issuing of an additional ten shares of Inalienable Basic to every man, woman and child in the United States of the Americas."

Pitt blinked. "Where'll they come from?" he blurted. "If I understand it, the Federal government is having its work cut out finding enough Basic to handle the present population."

Devlin nodded and smiled his slight smile at his visitor. "We must remember that this is People's Capitalism, but it is still capitalism. It is just that the Federal government has become the biggest capitalist of the land, with its share of the hundred largest corporations. But smaller companies continue to exercise free enterprise. So do professionals. Very well. We will increase the ownership by the government. Today, one hundred corporations pay part of their taxes in the form of common stock. After we win next year's election, it will be the *two* hundred largest corporations. And the stock so acquired will be issued to each citizen of the land."

"Holy Zoroaster! Why not?" Pitt Day gushed enthusiastically.

Devlin nodded. "Why not indeed? That, Mr. Day, is our basic platform. You are the first to hear of it. I trust I can depend upon you, in your columns, to give it sympathetic coverage."

"Why not! We Liberals have to stick together!"

6.

SAM BRUSTER was enthusiastic.

"Pitt," he said. "This is exactly what we wanted. We'll use all three of these columns on Devlin and the Liberals. Space them over a period of time. Work the ones the other fellows do, inbetween."

"Other fellows?" Pitt said. "I thought I was going to do all three parties."

Bruster looked at him. He scowled, and ran a beefy paw over his jowls. He tapped the three articles sitting before him on the desk.

"How in the name of the living Zoroaster could anybody as dedicated to the Liberals as you are, ever write objectively about either the Conservatives or the Futurists?"

"Under a different name, of course," Pitt told him reasonably.

"Different name?" Bruster said.

"Sure. I'll use my Madison Polk by-line." Pitt Day came to his feet urgently and leaned over the desk. "You practically promised, Sam. Shucks, I've already started working on the background material."

The syndicate official shook his head, but came up grudgingly with, "All right. Give it a try if you want. But I have my doubts. I'll get in touch with Harry Kennan and set up an interview. What was that by-line again?"

"Madison Polk."

"All right, but now listen. With these strong Liberal views of yours, don't get into any fights with Harry Keenan, understand? He's an old friend of mine and a good contact."

"I'll try," Pitt said.

7.

WHEN he got back to the mini-apartment that evening, following an enthusiastic celebration with Maureen

which had resulted in the draining of both their credit balances for the month, Pitt Day scowled to see an edge of light beneath his door. He couldn't remember leaving the lights on when he had left. In spite of his temporary job assignments, he couldn't afford to waste electricity. You managed on your Inalienable Basic, in the Ultra-welfare State, by watching every penny. The extra dividends from his one lone share of Variable Basic, helped, of course, but not enough that he could throw money around by leaving his mini-apartment lights burning all day.

He scowled again when he realized that the door was open. He thought he could remember locking it that morning. Not that there was much to steal, but . . .

He pushed his way in and was immediately grabbed by his arms by one burly character, and pushed into the hands of another, equally burly. The second, in turn, shoved him roughly into the mini-apartment's sole comfort chair.

"You Madison Polk?" the first one snapped.

"What's the meaning of this?" Pitt Day protested, beginning to struggle back to his feet.

The second one put a hand against his chest and pushed him down into the seat again.

"Answer the question," he growled. "Or do you want a bust in the teeth?"

"Yes, I'm Madison Polk, confound it. What's the big idea?"

"This apartment's in the name of Day, not Polk."

"He's a . . . well, a colleague of mine. Uh, I'm sort of borrowing it. Now who're you and what's the big idea?"

The two of them sat in unison on the couch which unfolded into a bed came sleeping hours.

The first one said, "It doesn't make much difference who we are. Call me Mr. Black, if you want a label, and this is Mr. Brown. Polk, I'll lay it on the line. We represent the Militant Pacifists."

"Militant *Pacifits*? Is this some sort of joke?"

The one called Brown growled, "Do we look like jokers, Mr. Polk?" He took a leather covered blackjack from an inner pocket and tapped it thoughtfully in the palm of his left hand a couple of times.

Pitt Day cleared his throat. "Of course not," he said. "Militant Pacifists, eh? Very worthy cause, of course."

"We're glad you think so, Mr. Polk," Black said. "It will make our assignment that much the easier. You've never heard of our organization, I take it?"

"Well, no," Pitt said.

"We don't get a good deal of publicity, but, then, pacifists seldom do. Certainly not favorable publicty. Our slogan, Mr. Polk, is Peace is the Product of Continuing Vigilance."

"Very well put," Pitt nodded. "Couldn't agree more, of course. But what's this got to do with me, gentlemen?"

Brown said, "In the old days, Polk, pacifists were largely laughed at in times of peace and thrown into jail, or worse, in times of war. Most people paid lip service to peace. Theoretically, everybody was for it. But those who worked hardest for peace were in actuality scorned."

"Usually thought of as cowards," Black added.

Brown leaned forward slightly and pointed a finger at Pitt Day's chest. "No more," he said. "Peace is so important these days that we can't afford

to be flower children any more. Peace is important enough to fight for, Polk, and we Militant Pacifists are willing to do—literally, Mr. Polk—anything to maintain it. Anything, including dying or killing those who stand in the way of peace."

"I see what you mean," Pitt said earnestly. "Nothing in the world today is so important as peace."

"That is correct. That is our stand. A war today, between the United States of the Americas and Common Eur-Asia would mean not just the destruction of a city or two, or even a nation. It would mean the end of the human race."

"Right!" Pitt nodded strongly. "If necessary, we'll fight to maintain world peace."

Black said, "I'm glad you're in full agreement with us, Mr. Polk. It makes our task that much easier."

"How could anybody be against you!"

Brown said sourly, "There are elements, Mr. Polk. That's why we're here."

"Well, why *are* you here?"

Black took over again. "Polk, what happened to the Cold War?"

"Cold War?"

"Uh huh. It started, actually, before the Second War was truly over. The conflict between what was then called the United States, and her satellites, and the USSR and theirs. A conflict of ideologies, the one over here called free enterprise, the other called communism. Both claimed to represent true democracy." Black twisted his mouth in sour amusement.

Pitt said, "Oh, the Cold War. I don't know. It just kind of dribbled out."

"Not exactly," Black said. "What really happened was this. Some of the old reasons for war became antiquated. In the old days, back in the 19th Century and before, the world powers such as England, France, the Neatherlands, Belgium, Portugal, were of the opinion that that nation which controlled the most real estate was the most powerful. They took off in all directions grabbing up every chunk of land they could get their hands on, before somebody else claimed it. Major wars were fought over remote islands or expanses of desert and other wasteland. The flag never set on the British Empire, and France was just about equally represented. Nations such as Germany, Italy and Japan came on the colonizing scene late in the game, but they did what they could to grab anything left.

"It was probably the United States that first realized that actual ownership of a colony, in the modern world, didn't necessarily mean you were making any profit out of it. It was no mistake that the Phillipines were given their independence. Once free of the governing of the islands, the United States was no longer responsible for such little items as education, health and such. Commercial and military treaties enabled her to stay on and dominate the country both economically and militarily, but she was saved the taxes it would have cost to continue actually to govern."

"I see what you mean," Pitt said.

"The other powers soon came around. England had bled herself white in her wars building and protecting her empire. Holding on to areas such as India was nonsense. It didn't pay off. So England pulled out and left the Indians to stew in their own grease. Not economically, of course, but politically. She kept the greater part of her investments in the country, in fact, in some fields in-

creased them. France got the message and dumped her colonizes as well, once again maintaining the economic dependence. Ten years after Morocco supposedly regained her independence, there was more French investment in that country than previously."

Pitt Day said, "But we were talking about the Cold War."

"That's what I'm getting to. Wars over colonies no longer made sense, because colonies no longer made sense. But we still had this conflict between ideologies. And, for awhile, a good many pesons thought wars for free enterprise, or communism, *did* make sense. Let's take two examples, Castro's Cuba and America's Asian Wars. The Soviets at that time backed Castro and wound up pouring hundreds of millions of rubles into his shaky economy. They evidently felt they couldn't afford not to, they might lose face if his revolution collapsed. The Asian War? Billions upon billions were spent backing a corrupt government in a country no bigger than New Jersey. What was the percentage, in either case?"

"What indeed?" Pitt Day blurted.

"Over a period of time, the two ultra-powers realized they were making fools of themselves, pouring out so-called aid to governments that actually were contemptuous of the donors. What did the Arab countries really think of Russia? What did the South American ones, of the United States?"

"You couldn't be righter," Pitt said emphatically. "So the Cold War fizzled out."

"Largely," Brown said. "However, Peace is the Product of Continuing Vigilance. There are elements still who would profit by war and the preparations for war. President Eisenhower, many years ago in his farewell speech, warned the nation against a military-industrial coalition. The danger is still with us."

"It certainly is!"

"With the withering away of the Cold War, the fantastically over-sized military machines of both superpowers began to dwindle. Promotions, obviously, fell off. So did another lucrative set-up for the professionals. In the old days, a general or admiral could put in his period of service and, upon retirement, figure on a soft job with one of the industrial firms he had formerly dealt with in his military capacity. Such jobs aren't as available now, and won't be again unless there is a flareup in the relationship between ourselves and Common Eur-Asia. So you see, Mr. Polk, there are elements who would like to see such a confrontation."

"Shocking," Pitt said indignantly. "For personal interest some elements would do *anything*."

"You're right," Black said, standing. "And we now come to the point. Next year are the elections. Already, writers such as yourself are beginning to do articles on the different views of the different parties. Already, you're going to be influencing the vote. Mr. Polk, the elements who would like to see a flareup in the Cold War largely support the Conservative Party. Mr. Polk, we told you we are willing to do anything, anything at all, to prevent a future war."

Brown had stood too. The burly pacifists stared down at Pitt.

"In this series of articles you are going to do on the Conservatives," Brown said. "We would be quite unhappy if they were favorable." He had his blackjack in his hand again and was tapping it thoughtfully into his left palm. "Quite unhappy," he re-

8.

WHEN THEY were gone, Pitt Day went over to the teevee phone and dialed the press syndicate. Sam Bruster was already gone, but he was able to redial and catch him at his apartment.

The heavyset man's face loomed in the screen. "Hello, Pitt, what's up?" he said.

"Look," Pitt said plaintively. "Do you have some sort of leak at your office?"

"How do you mean?"

"Holy jumping Zoroaster, it's hardly possible for me to get out of your office before somebody, knowing all about my assignment, comes and tries to twist my arm."

"What're you talking about?" Bruster said.

"Have you ever heard of Al and Bert of the Cosa Nostra, or at least, the modern version of it?"

Sam Bruster looked at him blankly.

"Or of Black and Brown, the two Militant Pacifists?"

"I've heard of the Militant Pacifists. A small, crackpot outfit."

"Well, Black and Brown aren't small. They say, in effect, that if I say anything favorable about the Conservatives they'll bust me. Al and Bert say if I say anything that detracts from the Conservatives, they'll bust me."

Sam Bruster was indignant. "They can't pull that sort of thing!"

"They can't'

"We'll fight 'em all the way down the line!"

"We will?"

"Definitely!"

"How?"

Sam Bruster was glaring. "You just stick to your guns, Pitt. Don't let them roach you. So far, you're doing fine. They can't intimidate us. Some nerve. See you tomorrow, Pitt. Thanks for calling."

His image faded.

Leaving Pitt Day staring at the blank screen.

9.

HARRY KEENAN said, "Madison—if you'll permit an older man to use your first name on such brief acquaintance—"

"Of course."

"Madison, all change is not progress."

"Certainly not."

"Perhaps no groups through history have done more harm than the do-gooders. We are not discussing motives, but the end product."

The plumpish politician let his eyes go around the elaborate escape room in which they sat as though seeking an example and came up with one.

"Take Central Africa, a few decades ago. It was already somewhat overpopulated, when such considerations as the production of protein foods are borne in mind. What did the do-gooders send them? Penicilin, vaccines, hospitals, sanitation devices—rather than birth-control know-how. Within twenty years, they had doubled their population with the results we all know."

Pitt nodded thoughtfully.

The Conservative leader laced his fingers over his rounded stomach. "Madison, I can see you are a perceptive young man. Let us speak off the record for the time. Go into this in depth."

"That's exactly what I need most, Mr. Keenan," Pitt said earnestly.

"Very well. Madison, it wasn't too many years ago that the do-gooders, the liberals, the bleeding hearts, were attempting to develop the world, to raise the standards of the so-called developing countries to the point al-

ready achieved in Western Europe and particularly in North America. Anyone who said nay to this, was howled down. When such researchers as Vance Packard pointed out in his *The Waste Makers* that the Earth's resources, particularly such items as copper, zinc, lead and petroleum were insufficient for the project, he was largely ignored.

"However, Madison, to the question *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* the answer is no. Perhaps this is unfortunate, especially from the view of religious and ethical codes, but it is true. I am not my brother's keeper. I am his competitor. Nature rules the survival of the fittest. It will not condone the survival of all."

"That's quite well put, sir," Pitt said.

"Thank you, Madison. Liberals and do-gooders might be distressed by the actuality, but survival of the fittest is still a basic rule of nature. If we allow, indeed encourage, the least fit to survive and prosper, then we fly in nature's face and sooner or later will pay for it. Our dreamers foresee a time when we will confront alien intelligence in our spread into space. Can we afford to breed less than our best? If we do, what will happen upon this confrontation? Because, Mr. Polk . . ."

"Madison is fine, sir."

". . . it is most likely that nature has that same law elsewhere in the galaxy. Survival of the fittest. When man lived in the caves, if a monster, or idiot, was born, most likely he was knocked over the head. And, indeed, very possibly his mother as well. Unfortunately, in those days they didn't know who his father might be, or he, too, might have been eliminated. It made sense."

"It certainly did."

"Of course, in this enlightened age, I do not suggest that we knock our morons and idiots over the head, but at least it might be well to sterilize them. So far as the backward nations are concerned, I see no reason why we who have won the race, should give them a helping hand. Let them win their own battles—if they can. Let those who are weak, go under. To the victor belongs the spoils, Madison, and we are the victors."

"Well put, sir!"

So far as races are concerned, I have no prejudices. Some of my worst friends are Jews, if you'll allow me a *bon mot*"

Pitt chuckled.

"I have no racial prejudices. Can't afford them, of course. I was born in Mississippi, but I have nothing against Nigras, *per se*. But I do insist on nature's law, survival of the fittest, and the Nigras don't seem to survive very well. This, of course, is very definitely off th record; the Nigra vote has to be kept in mind. However, there's an example of what I'm dwelling upon. Neither in this country, nor in their own independent nations in Africa have they made much of a mark."

"That's right," Pitt said thoughtfully. "A few exceptions, of course, but largely they don't make much of a mark."

"Fine," the older man nodded. "So much for international and racial matters. Let us deal with our own land and ourselves. Madison, we conservatives are sometimes dubbed The Establishment. Very well, what is wrong with The Establishment? How did it get established? Down through history, the best elements in society have come to the top. When they stop being the best elements, history discards them. How many dynasties

ruled Egypt, through her long centuries? Something like thirty, if I am not incorrect. That means that a new group worked its way up, periodically, and overthrew the old, because the old had become less than the best. The new Establishment ruled until it, in turn, became less than the best."

Pitt Day nodded in obvious complete agreement. "Survival of the fittest in society as well as in nature, eh?"

"Exactly, my boy. Now then, as to the program of the Conservative Party, next year. If my tap lines to my old friend, Steven Devlin, serve me, he wants to double the Inalienable Basic issued to every citizen of the United States of the Americas on birth. Twenty shares to each citizen, rather than ten. Nonsense. It would rob our people of what little initiative they have left."

"It would?" For the first time since the interview had commenced, there was the slightest of doubt in Pitt Day's voice.

"Certainly. Why work, why strive, if you can exist adequately without any effort whatsoever?"

"Well . . . the way your opponents would probably answer that, Mr. Keenan, is to point out that the life possible with the income of only ten shares of Inalienable Basic is pretty basic, when you consider the wealth of this country. And there's always the chance that the people will stand on their hind legs and put up a howl. After all, they're the overwhelming majority."

"Ah ha," the other waggled a fat forefinger at the columnist. "Now, here is your answer. In the first place, it is not the ultra-poor man who revolts against the status-quo. He's usually too stupid. That's why he's ultra-poor. Look back through the history of revolt and you'll find that the great revolutionists were almost invariably from the upper classes. Jefferson and Washington were wealthy planters, Benjamin Franklin, a successful businessman. Robespierre, Danton and Marat were of the middleclass. Fredrick Engels, the life-long collaborator of Marx, was a rich English industrialist, and Marx, himself, came from a well-to-do middleclass family. So did Lenin, so did Daniel DeLeon.

"Your real poverty striken have not the gumption nor ability for revolt. Fidel Castro was not from a poor background, nor were most of his followers when they were guerrillas up in the mountains. But when Ché Guevera went to Boliva and attempted to stir up a similar revolution among the poorest of poor Indians, they wouldn't stir. Instead, they informed on him. As poverty striken as India was, immediately after gaining her independence from England, there was precious little support of the Left. The same applied in Africa. And recall in history that it wasn't the proletariat of Rome that overthrew the Empire, it was overthrown from without."

"You certainly have a point, sir," Pitt chuckled sourly. "However, strictly from my own view, I wouldn't mind it being twenty shares instead of ten."

"Oh, don't *misunderstand* me, my boy. We Conservatives stand for pragmatism. We are in favor of dividing the population into three. Eighty percent will continue to receive ten shares of Inalieanble Basic on birth. Fifteen percent, our professionals, artists, teachers, small businessmen, who have proven their worth to the country by their own efforts, will be

issued twenty shares, as will their children. The top five percent will be issued fifty shares, as will their children, and theirs."

Pitt Day was taken aback. "How do you determine who is to be the top five?"

Harry Keenan smiled. "They've already determined it by having the highest income."

"But they'd have the least need for the fifty shares."

"That isn't the point. To belong to the upper five percent would be a status symbol, an honor, an indication of your position in society. The whole nation would have the stimulous to *try* to get to that point. But there is another element. We must protect our best. Suppose we have an outstanding scientist, artist, or, ah, industrialist. Very well. Through his own efforts, he builds a considerable fortune. However, disaster of one type or the other strikes and his children, or grandchildren, are financially embarassed. Or, perhaps, they are the types who wish to go into the arts, or lead scholarly lives, or whatever. Their blood lines having already been proven good, they should receive the fifty shares so that they can perpetuate themselves, rather than drop into the ranks of the ne'r-do-wells who have not the ambition nor ability to rise above their ten shares of Inalienable Basic."

Pitt said slowly, "So everybody with any push and gumption, who was born into the ranks of the lower eighty percent, would do everything he could to push up into the middle ranks, the fifteen percent."

"Exactly. And anyone with ambition in the middle ranks would do his utmost to secure the comparative affluence and well being, not to speak of the honor and prestige, of the upper five percent."

"And right off the bat, in my capacity as a columnist and the fact that I've accumulated a share or so of Variable Basic, I'd be in the middle group?"

"Of course, my boy. The very point is that we must reward our best elements. One of the greatest mistakes that the liberals and do-gooders make is to try to level off society, to eliminate classes. Everyone is born equal, they say. Nonsense. No one is the exact equal of another, neither physically, mentally, morally, nor any other way."

The Conservative leader leaned back in his chair and made his plump lips into a pout. "Classes we have had ever since civilization began, and classes we must and shall continue to have, Madison."

"Obviously, sir."

"If my anthropology serves me, man has been on this planet for at least a million years. For the first ninety-nine percent of that time, he was a communist, a primitive communist. That is, such propety as existed at all, belonged to the group in common. And so long as man remained on that level, he remained in poverty and ignorance. With the coming of class divided society—first chattle slavery—a leisure class evolved and had the time to begin investigating the sciences and arts, develpoping new inventions, improving the race as a race."

"How true, sir. Without an upper class, we'd still be nowhere."

"You are quite right, Madison. This applied under chattle slavery, it applied under feudalism, under classical capitalism, and now under people's capitalism. Don't quote me on this, my boy, for obvious reasons, but it is quite true that the rich get

richer and the poor get poorer, and that's the way it should be. It's just one more way of stating Nature's old law, the survival of the fittest. It applies among nations, as it does in any society. The present rich nations of the world are getting richer, the backward ones are falling behind in the race. We use them for sources of raw material and for markets for our manufactures."

Pitt Day thought about it. "How would this apply to Common Eur-Asia, sir?"

"In actuality, the same situation applies. They pretend a classless society, but as far back as the 1940s that Yugoslavian commie—what was his name?—Milovan Djilas, pointed out the emerging of what he called The New Class. Of whom did it consist? The best elements in the commie countries. The leaders, the scientists, the artists and writers, the managerial class, the top technicians in all fields."

"How right you are, Mr. Keenan."

The politician frowned at him. "You know, in my capacity, Madison, I must be a judge of people. I have had a little hobby for some years. By a man's tones and terminology, I can almost always tell which university he attended, or whether or not he attended at all. When we first began to talk, I pegged you as a Greater Columbia man, probbably a graduate of the School of Journalism. But after about ten minutes, I decide I was wrong, that you must have attended Harvard. But now, I'm not sure, your accent seems to grow progressively upper class, even British. Madison, did you go to Oxford? Rhodes scholar, or something?"

Pitt Day cleared his throat. "Well, no sir. You were right the first time. Columbia." He cleared his throat again. "Mr. Keenan, this material is fine; however, I need some background things about you, personally."

"Certainly, Madison. My life is an open book."

"Well, for one thing, what you've been saying about classes and all is fascinating. What is the source of your own fortune? How did you fight your way up to the top and acquire it?"

"Acquire it? I inherited it."

"Oh." Pitt hesitated. "Well, how did your father acquire it?"

"See here, Madison, haven't you ever read *The Rise of the Great American Fortunes?*"

"No sir, I'm afraid not."

"Well, my great-great grandfather founded the fortune selling, ah, somewhat condemned salt pork to the South during the War Between the States. He was far sighted enough, had the initiative, to invest the money gained in Switzerland, rather than Confederate bonds."

10.

Sam Bruster hit the manuscript on the desk before him with the back of his right hand. "Pitt," he said, "I've just finished reading your final column on Harry Keenan and the Conservatives. Excellent!"

"Thanks, Sam." Pitt Day sat across from him in the Press Syndicate official's office.

"As a matter of fact, I've got a couple of bits of good news for you. First, yesterday I talked your columns over with Mr. Alexander."

"Who?"

"The business manager of the syndicate. Uhhh, I didn't bother to let him know that Pitt Day and Madison Polk were one and the same writer, especially in view of your dramatic turnabout in alliegence. At any rate,

he's okayed the payment of one share of Variable Basic for each set of pieces."

"I get *two*?"

"Right. But that's not all. I got a phone call from Keenan last night. He was pretty impressed by the first two columns of yours that we ran. Liked the manner in which you handled so sympathetically, the overall picture. He wants you to get in touch with him on the possibility of doing some speech writing for the elections."

"Zo-ro-as-ter!"

"Right," Sam Bruster grinned. He glanced back down at the manuscript. "It's a darn shame you're so committed. I would have liked to have had you work on Jim Simonsen and the Futurists."

Pitt said anxiously. "How do you mean?"

Sam Bruster looked at him. "Well, since you've so definitely switched from the Liberals to the Conservatives . . ."

Pitt said, "Why, I figured on doing the Futurist Party pieces under my Clark Temple by-line."

Sam Bruster looked at him for a long empty moment. Finally, he said, "Look I don't hold any brief for Jim Simonsen's radical futuristic ideas, but we'd had in mind being objective. You'd be too strongly opinionated to do them justice."

"Why?" Pitt Day was distressed. "You promised me I could do all three of this series."

The heavy-set man had a frustrated expression. However, just then one of his teevee phones buzzed and he flicked the screen alive.

He went through the usual amenities, winding up with, "I'll have him get in touch with you, Mr. Devlin. However, I am afraid he is all tied up." He flicked the switch off and turned back to Pitt in amusement. "That'll give you a laugh. That was Steve Devlin of the Liberals. He's mulling over the idea of lining up Pitt Day to do some speech writing."

"Holy jumping Zoroaster, Sam, don't go turning down any jobs for me!"

Sam Bruster looked at him blankly. "You're all lined up with Harry Keenan."

"I've got two typewriters."

Bruster shook his head. "Look, to get back to Jim Simonsen and the Futurists . . ."

"I'll start on it tomorrow." Pitt came to his feet, anxious to get out before the other could refuse him. But then a twitch of consideration came over his face. He said, thoughtfully, "Sam, could I use one of your phones to check my apartment for calls?"

"Go ahead."

Pitt Day bent over one of the teevee phone screens and dialed. He said, "Any calls?"

A robot-like voice answered. "Two calls. One from a Mr. Al, the other from Mr. Black for Madison Polk. Both said they would get in touch later."

"Oh, oh." Pitt flicked the phone screen off.

"What's the matter?" Sam Bruster said.

Pitt Day thought about it. "Nothing," he said. "Look, Sam, this assignment under the Clark Temple pseudonym to cover the Futurists. I, uh, think that for the next week or so I'll be staying with my fiancée, Maureen Kingsley. You or whoever else on the staff can get in touch with me there. Here, I'll give you her address."

11.

MAUREEN met him in the hall outside her mini-apartment, frowning slightly. "Pithy. . . ," she began.

"Confound it, Mo, stop calling me that. You sound as though you're lisping something that has to do with urine."

"Why, Pithy, you made a funny."

He straightened his shoulders and his expression of piercing intellectual curiosity came over his face. "It's not in keeping with my position as a, well, a political pundit."

"Good Heavens to Betsy," she muttered. She sighed and said, "All right, Pythias. But if I had a name like that I'd want people to have a nickname for me."

"Call me Pitt." He added with a slight air of condescension, "or Madison Polk, or Clark Temple."

She shook her head in despair. "I suppose I'll hear all about it, shortly. At any rate, the reason I came out here is to tell you there're two young fellows waiting for you inside. I've never seen them before but they asked for Clark Temple and I remembered you sometimes wrote under that name."

"Two young fellows? How did they know I'd be here?"

She shrugged.

"Uh, look, Mo, they didn't say anything about being members of the Militant Pacifists or the Cosa Nostra, did they?"

She looked mystified. "They didn't say who they were. What have you been getting into, Pithy?"

He didn't answer that and his face lost its political pundit air and took on its more natural worriedly-anxious mein. He followed her back into the mini-apartment.

The two came to their feet from where they'd been seated on the convertible couch, when Pitt and Maureen entered. They appeared to be in their early twenties and average types, possibly a bit on the earnest of expression side.

"Mr. Clark Temple?" the one who seemed slightly older said.

"Yeah, that's right," Pitt said.

The other looked at Maureen Kingsley. "This is sort of private. Is there any way we could talk to Mr. Temple for just a few minutes alone?"

Maureen shrugged. "I don't see why not. I'll run on down to the corner for something I need."

When she was gone, Pitt stared at them. "What's this all about?"

The older said, "Mr. Temple, we represent the YFL."

"Oh?"

The other one said, "The Young Futurists League."

"Oh," Pitt said. "Well, what can I do for you?"

The first one said, "Mr. Temple, some of the older members of the parent organization aren't very happy about us Young Futurists. They think we're a little too aggressive. However, we feel that a revolutionary outfit has to be tough."

"Right!" Pitt said. "If we radicals are ever going to get anywhere we can't let 'em bulldoze us."

The others were slightly taken aback.

The elder said, "We heard about your assignment to do some columns on Mr. Simonsen. The Futurist Party, Mr. Temple, is a minority party. We don't have the resources of the Liberals or the Conservatives. We don't get the newscoverage nor the amount of time on Tri-Vision. In fact, Mr. Temple, we feel there's a sort of conspiracy of silence against us."

Pitt's face took on a bulldog scowl. "I think you're right and that we

(cont. on page 100)

SAINT FRANCIS NIGHT

GORDON EKLUND

Gordon Eklund's last story for us was "Second Creation" (March, 1975); he makes a long-awaited return with a story about the police chief of San Francisco . . . in a San Francisco that has all but forgotten the existence of crime . . .

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

ALTHOUGH the citizens of this free city were notorious throughout most of the civilized world as a people who never slept, Kendrick Drake had fallen into deep slumber at seven o'clock this particular night; he had been bored. By ten, he had passed well beyond that point where he might easily be roused to wakefulness through the intervention of a helping human hand; but, being aware of himself as an awesomely thorough sleeper, a lover of dreams both natural and devised, Kendrick had earlier programmed his modest Page Street dwelling unit to toss him physically out of bed in the event of an urgent official call. And now it came: the first such call in five years. The room moved instantly into action.

Kendrick slept in the mathematical center of the room. He was rolled into the shape of a ball, his ankles firmly clasped in his hands. Suddenly, his body rolled. He sprang open like an activated stiletto. He turned and whirled through the air like a flesh-and-blood top. To his sleeping brain, it seemed as if he flew like a great white bird. Actually, he fell. The bare uncarpeted floor smacked his face.

He woke, groaning, holding his face. Kendrick Drake was a skinny man of twenty-seven, an inch less than six feet tall. He was handsome—a feature at odds with contemporary preferences—and when he wore clothes, he wore them well. He was Chief of Police for the Free City and County of San Francisco, which wasn't bad for a fellow of twenty-seven.

Seeing the blinking visaphone, Kendrick blinked too. Then, suddenly understanding, he crawled furiously across the floor and lifted the twitching receiver. He turned, glancing past his shoulder.

There, in the middle of the air, Robert Martinez had materialized. Robert was Kendrick's assistant; in truth, he was the only other member of the police force. Of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestory, Robert was normally dark almost to the point of blackness. But not tonight. His face was as white and pale as a real cloud.

"Robert?" said Kendrick, controlling his excitement.

"It's happened," said Robert. "We've got one. A murder."

"What?" said Kendrick. His hands began to shake so violently he could not hold the receiver. Placing it upon

the floor, he shouted, "Impossible!"

"I'm standing six feet away from what's left of a dead man. I'm not kidding, Kendrick."

"You're not?" Kendrick fought to recover his first-degree dignity. Abruptly, an idea struck him. "I do seem to recall—early in my father's term—a rather freakish case. A suicide. Caused, if I recall, by the positions of Neptune and Uranus in conflicting houses. Perhaps—"

"This isn't suicide, Kendrick. The man doesn't have a head."

"No head?"

"None."

"Oh," said Kendrick, shaking worse than ever now.

Robert supplied the hard facts: "299 Bay Street. Performers, dawdlers, that type. The decedent—Crosby Franklin. I guess. Like I said, no head."

"I'll be there shortly," Kendrick said.

He waited until Robert Martinez's image had wholly dissolved, then dashed to the bathroom to empty himself. Then, more slowly, he made his way to the kitchen and accepted a dose of nutritous food. He punched an injection of amphetimine and felt instantly improved. He dressed himself, seeking to remember. A hundred fifty years ago, Malcom had announced the completion of the anti-crime crusade. Since that time, there had never been a murder in the free city; he was sure of that. Crimes did occur—occasionally—for no process was perfect. Just three years ago, Kendrick had personally apprehended a burglar in the lower Sunset, a nine-year-old boy suffering from leprosy; the boy had stolen a bar of chocolate from a city vendor.

But murder? No—never.

He hurried now, excited to the

edge of fury. It wasn't until he reached the street that he realized he had forgotten his badge and credentials. He shrugged, hurrying on. He shiverd, for it was actually cold. The dome kicked up a brisk westerly wind; he guessed it must be winter. Artificial leaves flapped through the air like brown butterflies. Ahead, at the corner, flashed a red sign:

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY—SFPD

Below this message sat Kendrick's personal transport booth. He passed through the glass doors and locked them behind. As he turned, he noticed a young boy, plainly revealed by the twin bright moons. But wait. The boy was walking toward the park. He was going in the wrong direction.

A violater!

For a moment, Kendrick's hand twitched toward the abort lever. But how could he be bothered with a case of wrong-way walking when murder lay only as far away as his fingertips? Frowning at himself, he tapped out: 299 Bay Street.

And flew. His body splintered, shattered into various component molecules, which streaked through the cold night air, zipping past other traveling souls. The trip was quick. At the end, another booth waited to receive and reconstruct him.

So, when Kendrick stepped into the empty silence of Bay Street, he was quite whole again. Distantly, an owl hooted deeply. Above, upon the dome, the moons sat full and red and bloody. Nearby, a great hound howled at the sky. Kendrick, shielding his fear, stepped ahead.

TWO-NINE-NINE Bay Street was a squat rectangular glass building some dozen stories high and occupying a whole city block. The invisible outer elevator answered Kendrick's first whistle by plucking him off the ground and carrying him to the lip of the twelfth floor, where he was pushed through a transparent window and carried down a slender hallway and deposited outside an innocently wooden door.

He knocked manually.

Robert let him in. After a moment's greeting, Kendrick turned and surveyed the room. More than anything, he was immediately struck by the casual impersonality of the place. There was sufficient furniture—the usual chair and lamps and table—all floating properly in the air. He caught the outline of a suspended bed just below the ceiling, and a plate of moving sculpture—abstract in design—stood highlighted by the bare artificial light of the windows. The taste exhibited was wholly that of the manufacturer; there was nothing distinctive or individual here.

"The body?" Kendrick asked.

"The next room."

He raised an eyebrow. "Two rooms?"

"Three," said Robert.

Kendrick was impressed. "So tell me what you know."

"A dawdler, as I expected. An extremely wealthy one. Forty-two years old. First-degree ancestory dating back to the charter. Played zeroball since his teens. Professional squads—Mars, Luna. Supposed to have been good. Quit because he'd become too slow on account of spending his off-months here."

"Relationships?"

"Dozens. All women. Only one legal and current: dates back hardly more than a week."

"And he is—was—a citizen?"

"Yes."

"Um." Kendrick played briefly with his chin. "Well, what say we take a

look at the remains?"

"If you want." Robert seemed hesitant.

"Is something wrong?"

"Have you ever seen a dead man before, Kendrick?"

"Of course. My father, for one."

"I mean a violently dead man."

"No."

"Well, then hold onto yourself. This is very bad. I represented the force during the renegade difficulties and this is worse than anything they did."

They moved into the adjoining room. For a moment, Kendrick examined the furnishings, but there was nothing. The only object in the room was a free music box, where nude dancers churned and swayed to some ancient melody. Kendrick was unable to identify the piece. It sounded vaguely like the Rolling Stones. Maybe early Kinks. An obscure track in either event.

Then his eyes came to rest upon the dead man and after that, his attention thoroughly riveted, he had no chance for private conjectures.

Robert had not exaggerated. The man lay unclothed upon his back near one wall. From the tips of his toes to the stump of the neck, he was nearly a normal man. Above the neck, however, there was nothing. The cut was neither clean nor sharp; the amount of blood was awesome. A puddle on the floor was wider than the man was tall.

Kendrick said, "My God."

Robert placed a hand on Kendrick's shoulder. "It was cut with an ax, I think. But the weapon isn't here."

"Nor the head," Kendrick murmured.

Robert steered him toward the door. "Let's go, Kendrick."

"All right."

The chilly impersonality of the central room was a relief after the horror of the rear. Kendrick stood beneath a chair and clapped his hands. He was lifted easily into the air and dropped in the seat. "Rest," he said softly, and the chair tilted so that he could lie flat. He shut his eyes. Robert's voice penetrated the darkness.

"Do you still think it's suicide?"

"No. Play some music. You know my tastes."

Kendrick waited. The twanging of amplified guitars suddenly invaded the room and he relaxed visibly. "That's lovely," he said. "Middle Beatles. *She Said.* If nothing else, Crosby Franklin knew his music." He listened a moment longer, then said, "How did you learn of the killing?"

"A call at the station. The visaimage was disguised. He hid under a blanket."

"A man?"

"Who knows? Didn't I tell you any of this?"

"I didn't give you time." Kendrick opened his eyes. Robert had taken an adjoining chair. "We're never going to catch him," Kendrick said. "Or her. Never."

"I know," Robert agreed. "It's impossible."

THE MAN who materialized in the center of the room was huge, bordering upon the grotesque. He wore a uniform of blue silk, sprinkled with ribbons and medallions, and a service cap tilted at a jaunty angle. He appeared fifty or sixty and his head, beneath the hat, was as bald as a rock. Folding his arms across his vast middle, he frowned.

"The chief of police!" he cried, his voice eminating from the wall phone. "I was informed he was present here."

Swiveling his neck, trying to see, Kendrick said, "I am the chief, sir." Hurriedly, he ordered the chair to drop him. On his feet, he stood rigidly at attention.

"The central computer." The fat man enunciated his words carefully, giving each syllable individual attention. "Through its mechanisms, I am informed a dead man lies at this address. Where is my chief of police?"

"I am Kendrick Drake, sir."

"But, man, your badge." A malicious grin crossed the fat man's face. "I am afraid I must demand your credentials."

"I forgot—when I left—I—" The fat man silenced Kendrick with a frown. Kendrick knew who he had to be. Only two men were permitted to override visaphone circuits. One was the mayor—whom Kendrick had met—and the other was the crime commissioner.

"Commissioner Dodd—" Kendrick began.

"Shut up. Get out of here. I'll talk to Martinez."

"But I'm the chief."

Commissioner Dodd smiled. "Unfortunately, that is something neither of us knows for certain."

Kendrick turned to go.

"Tomorrow at ten," a voice called after him. "Appear in my offices. Properly garbed."

Laughter followed him out. The commissioner had deliberately humiliated him. For a moment, he considered starting an investigation at once by questioning the other residents of the building. But he wasn't quite ready yet. He would wait to hear what the commissioner had to say.

Outside on the sidewalk, he kept an eye on the domeclock. Thirty minutes passed—sixty. Beside the clock, the disk of one moon ran through its four phases and started another cycle. An occasional pedestrian passed, headed in the direction of Broadway and Grant, latecomers to the nightly hill celebrations. This part of the city was a quiet place, despite its close proximity to North Beach. A day ago, Kendrick would have surrendered an arm for a dwelling unit up here. But now he wasn't so sure.

As a boy, he had often ventured into these same streets—not Bay Street, naturally, but Broadway and upper Grant and the sloping hill of Kearney, sometimes standing all night shielded by the hulking remains of pre-charter buildings, watching the passing parade of artists and musicians and honestly simple dawdlers. He was too young at the time to enter their places of entertainment, too innocent to attempt to converse with them, but just watching had been quite enough to satisfy him—just seeing. He had admired these people—romanticized them, he now realized—wanting to be the same, 'when all along he had known how impossible that was. He could never be a member of that select group whose sheer spontaneous creativity threatened to burst the seams of a purposely static society (he had discovered that phrase in an infotape and made it his own). Fate—and the law—required him to follow in his father's footsteps. When the time came, Kendrick Drake would assume the office of chief of police; but what he really wanted to be was a composer. His love for traditional music dated back to when he was only five or six, and he had often attempted to write his own tunes. For three years in his later teens, he had studied music seriously, but then his father suddenly died and barely at twenty-two Kendrick became chief of

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REGULAR	MG TAR	MG NIC	MENTHOL	MG TAR	MG NIC
Kent Golden Lights Kings	**8**	**0.6**	**Kent Golden Lights Menthol***	**8**	**0.7**
Real*	9	0.8	Real Menthol*	9	0.8
Parliament*	10	0.8	Vantage Menthol	11	0.7
Vantage Kings	10	0.7	Salem Lights	11	0.8
Marlboro Lights	13	0.8	Doral Menthol	11	0.8
Winston Lights	13	0.9	Kool Milds	14	0.9
Doral	13	0.9	Belair	15	1.0
Viceroy Kings	16	1.0	Kool	17	1.3
Tareyton Kings*	16	1.2	Salem	18	1.2
Marlboro Kings	18	1.1			
Winston Kings	19	1.2			

*FTC Method

FILTER BRANDS (100's)

REGULAR	MG TAR	MG NIC	MENTHOL	MG TAR	MG NIC
Kent Golden Lights 100's*	**10**	**0.9**	**Kent Golden Lights Menthol 100's***	**10**	**0.9**
Vantage 100's*	11	0.9	Merit Menthol 100's*	12	0.9
Merit 100's*	12	0.9	Salem Long Lights*	12	0.9
Parliament 100's*	12	0.9	Virginia Slims Menthol 100's	16	0.9
Winston Lights 100's*	14	1.0	Benson & Hedges Menthol 100's	18	1.0
Virginia Slims 100's	16	0.9	Salem 100's	18	1.2
Tareyton 100's*	16	1.2	Belair 100's	18	1.3
Benson & Hedges 100's	18	1.0	Kool 100's	18	1.3
Marlboro 100's	18	1.1	Winston Menthol 100's	19	1.2
Pall Mall Gold 100's	19	1.4			

*FTC Method

Kent Golden Lights
Taste 'em. You won't believe the numbers.

B

Of All Brands Sold: Lowest tar: 0.5 mg."tar," 0.05 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report, December 1976. **Kent Golden Lights 100's Regular and Menthol:** 10 mg."tar," 0.9 mg. nicotine; **Kings Menthol:** 8 mg."tar," 0.7 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC Method. **Kings Regular:** 8 mg."tar," 0.6 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette FTC Report, April 1977.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

police. When his many-great grandfather had established the line of Chief Drakes, the position had been an important one. But what did it mean any more? Chief of police in a city without crime. He had always tried to do his best—but that was seldom very much. They would not allow him to resign. The law said he must have a successor at hand—a son at least eighteen. And Kendrick felt it was already too late for that.

"You must be freezing," Robert said, dropping lightly at his side.

"No, just thinking."

"Don't feel bad. He hated your father. Now—through you—he has a chance to settle old scores."

"I don't care," Kendrick said. "Let's walk."

"All right." They went down Bay to the corner of Powell, then turned to ascend the gentle sloping hill which led toward the already visible golden lights of Broadway. They walked in silence. The houses in this part of the city were big, old, battered. Some of them had, in the distant past, stood decades without hearing more than a few stray words of English. Italian had been the language then—even Chinese. Even yet, an odor of distant places seemed to run strongly through the air. But each year the smell grew less and less distinct. Soon it would be gone for good.

"Well, what happened?" Kendrick finally asked. He stopped. They had come too close to the crowds of Broadway. He didn't want to go there.

"He thinks he's solved it. A party of ranchers was admitted yesterday from Wyoming. Two haven't been located. He wants me to start my investigation with them. They're somewhere up here—" he waved at the lights blazing ahead "—but can they prove it?"

"Don't they have conditioning in Wyoming?"

"Yes, but it's not always effective. Two murders last year—three the year before."

"And so you and Commissioner Dodd plan to pin the crime on one of them."

"Nobody said anything like that, Kendrick."

"I've changed my mind. I'm going to try and catch him. The real killer too—not your Wyoming man."

"Oh, hell, Kendrick."

"No, Robert. Listen to me. This is murder. Wouldn't it be something if I popped into the commissioner's office tomorrow with the real killer under my arm? Forget everything. You loved my father. Well, this would be a victory for him, too."

"But it's silly. There are a million people in this city."

"I've read books. I know how it's done. I'll start with Franklin's woman. Give me her address."

"She won't help you." But he passed a folded paper to Kendrick. "You're going there now?"

"Yes."

"Then, be careful. It's a third-degree neighborhood."

"Isn't that odd?"

"Who knows?" Robert said, shrugging.

"I'll be in contact with you." Kendrick stood for a moment as if trying to remember some essential fact. Whatever it was, it escaped him. Turning, he went in search of a transport booth. Glancing up, he saw the hourly headlines racing across the dome and paused to watch.

INEXPLICABLE DEATH NEAR WHARF.

Which seemed to say it all.

FLYING, Kendrick Drake for an in-

stant was dead, but then, through the intervention of an awesome science, he was resurrected; he breathed again; he was alive. Hurriedly, he fled the transport booth, taking to the streets. He held the address he sought clutched tightly in one hand. Ahead of him, a mob of third-degree citizens clogged the intersection. Aimlessly, they surged forward and back. Great yellow streetlamps burned from above, lighting the dirty gray pavement, turning this world into a glowing land of artificially eternal daylight. This was as close as Kendrick had been able to get to the address he sought; transport booths were rare objects in the land of the third-degree.

The mob recognized him instantly and a section sauntered over to circle him like a belt. Dark, gaping, toothless smiles were turned upon him. Others shouted indecipherably. Kendrick struggled to push through the mob. He had little room for thought, but one question did burn: how could she live down here? Crosby Franklin had been a wealthy man. Why was his legal woman buried in this hell?

"Gimmewatchagot," a beggar demanded.

"Anymunnybegoddanuf," said a voice from behind.

Kendrick had never been down here at night before. Didn't these people ever sleep? He saw them as usual—the crouching street vendors, shouting beggars, beggaring whores—and the mob, the great, ever present, swirling mob. *Oh God,* he thought, thanking that disembodied spirit (as always down here) for the great good fortune of his birth. The creatures continued to swirl around, blending into a formless mass where no individual life was allowed. A finger scratched his naked hip. A bare heel brushed his toes.

Behind, a hand tightened around his rear strap. He pulled, jerked, and, *twang*, the belt snapped. Stung, he jumped, and the mob howled wildly. A face without a nose sought to kiss his lips. A hand fondled between his legs. Kendrick dropped his chin, knowing he had made a mistake. It was worse now than during the day.

"Gimmewatchagot," said someone.

"Leskillem."

But they wouldn't do that—they couldn't kill him. These people sought to use fear as a weapon, but Kendrick knew better. They could kiss and fondle, scratch and claw, but they could never kill.

"Aint nomoren whacha see," a young girl said. Except for her nose—as big and red as a beet—she was pretty. She pushed the others away. "Seedem furst. Magudfran. Gitaway."

The mob, chastened, faded quickly.

Dazzled by the girl, Kendrick paused to thank her.

"Whazat enyahand?" she asked.

He glanced down at the paper. "Oh, this?" He held it so the girl could see. "Do you know this woman?"

"Lemme see." She leaned very close. Suddenly, in a flash, she grabbed the paper and popped it in her mouth.

"Hey!" said Kendrick. "Give that back!" He grabbed at her, but she slipped effortlessly away, her body as slick as a glass pole. He managed to hold her arm and turned her, getting his fingers between her lips. She bit down hard with bare gums. *"Ouch."* He drew out his hand.

The girl was screaming, her cheeks bulging with the paper.

The mob came scurrying back. Kendrick felt moisture streaking his back. They were spitting at him.

"Kindasuck!" one called.

Lips touched his ear. Words were whispered: "Shecudna red it nohow."

Then a piercing laugh.

He ran. The mob romped after him, howling, spitting. He tripped an old man who tried to block his path, leaped over the fallen form and turned a corner. Abruptly, darkness closed around him. He collapsed gratefully within its protective embrace.

"46 Durban Place," he murmured, happy he'd not forgotten.

Then, finding a bit of waste paper on the street, he wiped his back. Eyes glared hatefully from within the light. When they shouted, Kendrick shouted back, mocking their crudities.

Then he turned away. He had noticed the street sign at the corner: Durban Place.

He would not be touched back here. Third-degree citizens knew better than to venture into unlighted streets. Stories were told and retold of great fabulous creatures who lurked in these back alleys and pounced upon and devoured whatever dared pass. As a boy, Kendrick had heard these stories too, but his father always cautioned him of their basic untruth: "It's a way of keeping the third-degrees within their assigned neighborhoods. People like us know better."

But it came as no surprise to Kendrick that he was nervous walking here. The stories, whatever his father had said, carried a certain ring of truth.

This particular street was silent and empty. Huge rectangular dwelling units rose stiffly on both sides of the narrow alley, as sharp and tall as glass knives. Even in the daytime, the sun did not penetrate here. This was a world of shadow and darkness, the perfect domain for fabled creatures.

He came to Number 46. Standing on the walk, he called the elevator, then laughed. Nothing like that down here. He would have to walk.

He found her name in the directory—Agatha Quick—then mounted the stairs. She resided on the ninth floor. He was panting by the time he reached her door. He knocked.

No reply.

He knocked again.

This time, there was a response—but it came from an unexpected direction—from behind. Across the hall, a door creaked open. Kendrick whirled. The face in the doorway was that of an old wrinkled woman.

"This woman here—" he snapped his head at the door to Agatha Quick's home "—is she here? Do you know?"

"No know," the woman said, clearly frightened. "Go bang in there but no know." Suddenly, her face was gone. The door slammed shut. He heard the clank of a lock.

Go bang, the woman had said. What had gone bang?

He stationed himself across the hall with the heel of one foot resting against the floorboard. Then he dashed forward and slammed his shoulder against the door. He said, "Ouch," because it hurt; the door popped open.

He stepped through into Agatha Quick's home.

And nearly gagged.

The room was hot, sweltering. But worse than the heat was the odor. Whatever it was, it made him sick. He took a moment—holding his breath—to examine the room. It was a tiny place. The white plaster walls were cracked and creased with long jabbed lines. Sparse, earnestly plastic furniture hugged the bare floor.

Three chairs, a stool, a couch. On top of the couch lay the woman. Mouth open, eyes shut. Beneath her head was a pool of blood. In the center of the pool, he noticed a black shape.

Throwing open a window, Kendrick thrust his head outside. Somebody was dead in here. Agatha Quick? He glanced at the body. Blonde hair—a fashionable gown slit to the thighs—a face that seemed rather plain. But a good part of her head was missing.

He went to the body. The smell was bearable now. Bending down, he touched the shape he had seen in the blood: a gun. Remembering about fingerprints, he moved his hand away. He had never seen a gun before. He was surprised at how small and innocuous it looked.

Suicide? He sat on the window sill. The door had certainly been locked from the inside.

There was an old-fashioned wall phone. Pressing his thumb against the slot, he requested a listing of all incoming and outgoing calls made over this circuit in the last two weeks.

The list fell instantly from the wall chute. Kendrick counted sixteen incoming calls but only four outgoing. The majority had been placed to or come from a man named Andrew Borah: address on Bay Street. Crosby Franklin had been called twice earlier in the week and once tonight. He tucked the listing into his strap, then stood motionlessly, listening. He could hear it clearly now: a sound like water dripping. It seemed to come from behind a door in one wall.

He approached the door carefully. Reaching forward, he grasped the knob. He turned and pulled. The door opened a bare crack.

Then it slammed forward, hitting his face. He fell, rolling on his side, reaching out. He caught the thing by the ankle and pulled it down.

Kendrick was the first to stand. The creature was not—as he had first thought—a wild animal. It was a boy, but one whose entire body was covered with thick brown fur. But the face was clean and bare and plainly human.

Gently, he asked, "Who are you?"

The boy appeared to understand. He seemed to nod.

"I won't hurt you," Kendrick said.

The boy nodded again—clearly this time.

Kendrick smiled, nodding back. Reaching out, he extended a hand.

The boy stared fearfully, then slowly raised his own hand. The two touched. Kendrick drew the boy to his feet.

"Well, well," he said. "Do you know you're the first I've ever seen?" He meant mutant. "But I'm not going to ask you anything. I would be happy, though, if you could tell me what happened here. Can you talk?"

The boy shook his head.

"Oh, that's too bad." He tried to maintain the necessary kindness in his tone. Taking a casual step forward, he laid a hand on the boy's shoulder, patting the fur. "My name is Kendrick. I'll take good care of you. I want to help you. I just got here a few minutes ago. I don't know anything."

The boy turned suddenly and, for the first time, he looked at the body of Agatha Quick. His reaction was instantaneous. He stood on his toes and held his hands high over his head. His lips parted and he let out a mournful wail. His body was tensed as tight as a rubber band. Then, just as suddenly, he relaxed; he was all right again. Then he began to cry and, for Kendrick, this was worse than awful.

Kendrick just stood there, unable to make up his mind. Then, finally, letting his emotions rule, he squatted down and drew the boy toward him. His bare face fell against Kendrick's chest. Kendrick stroked the bristly hair on the boy's head, murmuring gently as he did, paying no attention to what he said, knowing it was the tone that mattered.

Then he was crying too.

THEY FORMED a bizarre couple—man and boy—walking hand-in-hand at the edge of the known world. Only a few yards of concrete separated their feet from the shimmering paleness of the Bay. Kendrick wore his uniform—he had stopped at home to change; the boy was less finely dressed. He wore an old overcoat of Kendrick's which fit him in such a way that it concealed everything but his bare humanoid face. He looked like a tiny baby trapped inside a vast black tent. But he was safe. And that was what mattered.

Now they turned away from the water, walking toward Bay Street. Andrew Borah's residence was a big house occupying half a city block. A flash of green was visible through the tall front shrubbery: a real yard with real grass. Kendrick was impressed. He spied a gleam of light in the front windows of the house. Taking the boy's hand tightly, he led the way along the front walk.

They were met at the door by a man barely five feet tall. He wore a brilliant red wig that hung past his shoulders.

"Andrew Borah?" asked Kendrick.

The little man giggled.

"I'm Kendrick Drake."

"Of course." The man waved Kendrick inside. The boy mutely followed. "I'll take you to Mr. Borah."

"Thank you," Kendrick said.

They went up a steep flight of stairs, then down a low corridor. At the end of the hall, a fierce line of orange light glowed from under a heavy door. The little man tapped politely, then opened the door and nodded at Kendrick and the boy to enter.

They went into the room and, behind them, loudly, the door slammed shut.

The boy whirled at the sound.

"You appreciate my door?" asked the man in the big chair. He smiled at Kendrick. "During wet weather, the hinges actually creak, a lovely sound. Rust has been known to form. A delightful toy. A genuine antique. It goes well with this life, don't you agree?"

"I do," Kendrick said flatly. Stooping down, he murmured soothing syllables at the frightened boy.

"Borah," the man in the chair explained. He was tall, stately, white-haired, a gentleman, quite slender and dressed in the tight, bright fashions of a decade past. His hands, moving constantly as he spoke, were as thin and pale as bones. "Have we ever met, young Drake? I knew your father quite well."

"I'm sure we haven't," Kendrick said. He knew he would never have forgotten Borah. The man caused a puzzling mixture of emotions within him. The two most powerful were fear and disgust. More than anything, he wished he were out of this room. The suddennness of this reaction disturbed him. The boy clutched at Kendrick's leg, shivering and trembling.

"I have met Alfred," Borah said. "He seems uneasy in my presence. Sit down, please."

Kendrick went to the indicated floor chair and sat stiffly. The boy,

never allowing more than a few inches to separate them, came as well.

"Is that his name?" Kendrick asked. "Alfred?"

"It is." Borah yawned hugely. "You didn't know? Consider it a clue. I believe that is the reason for this visit. You are gathering clues."

Kendrick explained: "Yesterday evening, a woman named Agatha Quick—"

"She blew out her brains. Those few she had." His hands fluttered, swooped, danced. "I am aware."

"Oh," said Kendrick.

"And also poor Franklin. Somebody chopped off his head. May I make a suggestion? Take it or leave it. Find the head, you'll find the killer." He giggled, using a fragile fist to silence himself.

"I've thought of that," Kendrick said.

"Then you do not subscribe to your commissioner's theory? Dodd the dunce, we called him as boys. You don't suspect these Wyoming visitors?"

"No," Kendrick said. "I think—"

"You think I'm going to provide you with a solution. In other words, do your dirty work. I won't. But what I will do is hand you a favor. When you depart, my servant will give you a listing. Read it carefully. The names will be those men—and one or two women, I believe—who might have killed Crosby. I can guarantee only this: all of the people on my list possessed motives sufficiently powerful—in my opinion—to permit them to overcome anti-crime conditioning and kill. Have you tried looking for a mad man?"

Kendrick shook his head. The boy lay curled in his lap. "Should I?"

"Don't waste your time. Our killer may well be the only sane creature in this free city."

"What exactly was your relationship with Crosby Franklin?"

"An excellent question." Borah's face continued to shift through an apparently endless succession of expressions. Now, frowning, he said, "Crosby worked for me. Didn't Martinez tell you? Both Crosby and Agatha."

"Doing what?"

"That," said Borah, after a long pause, "is somewhat difficult to explain." Reaching up, he touched a cord dangling from the ceiling. A bell lightly tinkled.

"Refreshments," said Borah. "Do you have a hobby, Drake?"

"Music," Kendrick said. "Pre-charter music."

"Ah, jazz. It's Duke Ellington, isn't it?"

"No, rock and roll."

"I've heard of it." As if this were something prideful. "But it's too loud. I have my theater. Old Films. Movies, they were called. You ought to peek inside my library some day. Marvelous, marvelous items. More than a hobby: an obsession. Surely you see?"

"No," Kendrick said.

The servant entered, bearing drinks. Kendrick accepted sweet beer.

"We were discussing hobbies," Borah said, when they were alone again. "Your favorite performers?"

Kendrick said, "Middle Beatles. Kinks. Beachboys. A man named Van Dyke Parks. Neil Young. The Rolling Stones, of course."

Borah nodded, smiling. "And mine: Crosby Franklin and Agatha Quick."

"I'm afraid you'll have to explain."

"Crosby and Agatha. They were, you see, part of my hobby. They did . . . favors for me. Originally,

Crosby introduced me to Agatha. They had known each other on Mars. The mutant—when I learned of him—was an utter delight. Are you beginning to see? I ordered Crosby to contact the woman. She was lured to Earth, bringing the boy. I had told Crosby it was quite impossible without the boy. I don't know how he managed the smuggling. But he did."

"And why?" asked Kendrick.

Borah blinked furiously. "Why, you are stupid. They were my people. I paid them to permit me to observe—to watch—to study—their lives. I had done it with Crosby for years. In these decadent times, it is as close as a man can come to the traditional delights of stage and film. I recruit my actors from life, assigning each a certain role."

"What was Agatha's role?"

"Oh," said Borah, turning his palm in the air, "she was a suicide. I wanted to see if it was possible. And it was."

"Why?"

"I studied her relationship with Crosby. They had known each other for years on Mars. Crosby may well be this boy's father. He was a cruel lover. Her body, I suspect, will reveal the signs of his pleasure. Still, she was devoted to him. When he called, she came. We installed her in the neighborhood you saw. Of course, she could not go out—not with this boy. Crosby ignored her. I called, passing atrocious gossip. She became anxious, frightened. Last night, I called, informing her Crosby had gone to the police. She said I was a liar and attempted to phone him. He was not supposed to answer. He didn't, being dead. Then—thinking herself deserted—she took her own life."

"That hardly seems like enough reason," Kendrick said.

"There are anxiety producing drugs," said Borah. "We supplied her food and water. But—well, I'll tell you something: I'm not satisfied. She broke too easily. Next time, I must find a stronger subject."

Kendrick was standing before he realized what he was doing.

"You're not going?"

"You have nothing else to tell me?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Then I'm going." Kendrick held the boy against his chest. He was sleeping.

"But you didn't finish your beer."

"No. I didn't." Kendrick hurried toward the door.

As he went down the stairs, he heard Borah struggling to follow: "Come back—bring him back. I want to touch him. Please. Don't take him away. I must have him."

The little servant met him at the door. Kendrick accepted the promised list, then headed outside.

He turned in the direction of the nearest transport booth.

Momentarily, the boy awoke. From deep within, sounds emerged—squeaking, chirping. His arms swiveled, straining at Kendrick's neck. Kendrick murmured, "Hey now—it's all right." The boy relaxed.

Above, a quarter of the moon broke away from the whole and stood alone in the sky, swaying rhythmatically. The night was nearing its end. In one corner of the sky, a star suddenly went gloriously nova. The flash painted the sky an awful shade of yellow.

Reaching the booth, Kendrick placed the boy inside.

KENDRICK paused at the entrance to Alberto's Creamery—a small stewly pit located at the corner of Broadway and Columbus—and searched for

Robert. He was easy to find, seated at a table near the rear; otherwise, the pit was quite empty.

Kendrick tucked the boy under the table. He had fallen asleep again.

"How's the mob?" Robert asked.

"They're watching a fireworks display upon the dome. I didn't have any trouble."

"That's good." Robert was sipping stew. He waved his free hand at the empty room. "They won't come here if I'm inside. They hate me."

"Why?"

"Heredity. Who knows? I've spent every night of twenty years up here. I know their gossip, their movements, their obsessions. But I don't understand them. And I like it that way. We've made an arrest, Kendrick."

"A mistake."

"Because Borah told you so? Don't listen to him."

"You know him?"

"I know every dawdler in this city. He's one I wish I didn't."

"Was Crosby Franklin another?"

"Franklin was a monster."

Silently, Kendrick nodded. Outside, a voice howled at the sky. He shivered.

"The latest cult," Robert explained. "Worship of dogs. The last died in China two weeks ago. The cult works this way: the believers stay under cover until just before dawn. When they hear the fireworks, they come out. By the time the countdown begins, they have full control of the streets. They howl. You'll hear them in fifteen minutes. I'ts awful. In the beginning, they believe, there was dog. Somewhat thereafter, dog created man from his own manure. Dog—gentle, loving, kind—accepted a secondary position to his creation. He even agreed to die after only a brief life. Eventually, man murdered dog, tired of his pet. Substitute god for dog and what have you got? All the crackpot stuff since the dawn of time. And they think they've got something new and remarkable. Their howling is a way of begging god for forgiveness."

"Tell me about the arrest."

Robert pointed under the table. "First you tell me about that."

Kendrick explained about the boy.

"Don't let the mob catch him," Robert said. "Two weeks ago, they were worshipping mutants. But now it's dogs."

"The arrest?" said Kendrick.

Robert said the arrested man was a citizen of Wyoming. He had shared a disinterested relationship with a woman related to the Governor of Wyoming. A disinterested relationship was an indefinite but legal arrangement between man and woman without necessary conjugation and devoid of any element of consumation. It was very popular in the puritan mountain states. "This fellow," said Robert, "had a series of electrical shock devices built for him from his own designs. Naturally, the work was done here. He obtained a passage permit and came to pick up his devices personally. What happened was that a person was hurt inside—unbearably, some said—ecstatically, according to others—without any danger of permanent injury. The woman did not object. Still, the governor found out. A warrant was drawn up, calling the man a pervert. He came running here. He's headed our suspect list ever since. Given Crosby Franklin's known preferences, we thought we had our man. He was arrested an hour ago. A meek little man, like a ballerina. He'll confess before dawn."

"Bullshit, Robert."

"Well, you asked," he said, shrugging weakly.

"No alibi?"

"He says he was home."

"Motive?"

"He'll tell us when he confesses."

"And what are you going to do when the real killer strikes again?"

"Don't be melodramatic. He won't strike again. The commissioner suggests you go home to bed. Borah called him. He says he's solved your mystery for you."

"What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. Why should I tell him anything." Robert peeked beneath the table. "I think your mutant's awake."

"His name is Alfred."

Outside, another howling voice erupted passionately. Another joined this one. Inside the stewly pit, Kendrick felt safe, secure, warm. He told Robert: "I hate to see an innocent man punished."

"Who's innocent? You maybe, but not this man."

"And what about the real killer? Maybe he wasn't so wrong after all. Is murder always a crime? Who misses Crosby Franklin now that he's dead? Andrew Borah, perhaps, but anyone else? I'll tell you this, Robert: if it wasn't for this boy, I would go home to bed."

"That's heresy," Robert said, smiling. "What would your great-great-great grandfather say?"

Outside, the howling had reached an incredible pitch. The wailing cacophony penetrated and distorted the secluded, tranquil atmosphere of the pit. A cold wind entered suddenly, rustling the flaking paint. Kendrick shivered. Then there was silence.

"What's going on out there?"

"It's dawn," Robert said.

"Oh."

There was a scratching noise at the door: fingernails.

"What?" said Robert.

Kendrick turned with him. The door stood open, a dozen men crowded into the narrow opening. Behind them, the brilliant light of the newly resurrected sun blazed and burned.

"What do you people want?" Kendrick said.

"Keep quiet," said Robert.

One man emerged from the group, boldly entering the pit. He was old, small, stooped.

Pushing back his chair, Kendrick stood.

The old man lifted a trembling hand, pointing at Kendrick. He spoke, barely a whisper: "Dog."

Kendrick looked down. The man was pointing at the boy, who was awake now. His fur glistened strangely in the bare light of the pit.

"Dog?" asked the old man.

Kendrick shook his head. "No. Boy."

"Dog!" cried the old man, lunging suddenly forward. He stopped, raising both hands. "Dog . . . dog . . . dog." His voice was softer now.

"A mutant," Kendrick said.

"Get out of their way," Robert whispered. "They're mad—just get back."

"No!" Kendrick hovered protectively above the boy. He watched the old man, who came forward again.

"Please . . ." His voice seemed to come from a great distance. "We only want to see . . ."

Sharply, Kendrick said: "No!"

The old man's eyes cleared. He glared with hate.

"Get out of here," Kendrick said.

But the room was silent. Except for the old man's harsh breathing, the world was noiseless.

Then, at the door, a man howled. Another screamed: "Dog."

All were shouting now. "*Dog.*" The old man shut his eyes, threw back his head and shouted gloriously.

They all came forward at once. Kendrick threw up his hands, shielding his face, then fell. The mob stepped calmly around him. He pressed his face closer to the floor and tasted salt. The boy: where was he? Reaching out, clawing, Kendrick touched empty air. Then a foot stamped his hand, cracked the fingers, and he wept. Then he screamed, unwilling to see, but he heard: the chant came clearly: *Dog, dog, dog.* Tramping feet. Then he thought he heard Robert's voice.

A hand touched his brow. He opened his eyes. A glare. Slowly, he swiveled his head. Above him, Robert's round brown face dangled motionlessly.

The boy was gone.

"Help me up," he said.

"No, stay there. You're hurt."

"I have to find him."

"It's too late."

"Where?" He struggled to a sitting position. Then he stood, knees trembling. I'm going to find him, Robert."

"The hill."

"We'll have to walk." Old Telegraph Hill: sacred ground to nearly every cult. "You'll have to come with me."

"I will."

They went out together. The sun had crept fully into view. It lay quivering near the Pacific side of the dome. A Western sunrise this morning. Kendrick took a deep breath of clean air. Six o'clock headlines ran casually across the center of the sky.

They ascended the cracked, winding path which went up and up endlessly. Clinging to Robert's arm, Kendrick found gratification in his friend's prowess. It was his second-degree heritage—those tough stubborn genes. The center was always the most pure.

The paved portion of the road finally expired. They turned toward a trail formed of coarse heavy gravel. Footprints—deep and clean—ran through the dirt. People passed them, coming down from the summit. Robert went to speak to one man but Kendrick called him back.

"I'd rather see for myself," he said.

They glimpsed the stump of the old tower, then turned and mounted the last wooden staircase. The wood railing shook, threatening to topple.

Reaching the top, Kendrick cried: "Alfred!" He spun around. "Alfred!"

"Over there," Robert said, quietly.

Kendrick streaked across the pate of the hill. Beneath the sun, green grass gew tall, while sprouting flowers—fragile tulips, fluttering violets, smart daisies—waved in the gentle wind. Kendrick ran swiftly.

In the shadow of the tower, a mob had gathered, a silent and peaceful circle. First-degree fashion snuggled with second-degree fabrics. Silk mingled with plaid and plastic with velvet.

Kendrick slipped patiently through the crowd. When he reached the core, Robert stopped him, hands held high like the wings of a great bird.

"Don't look," he said.

But Kendrick had to look. Immediately, he looked away.

Robert put an arm around his shoulders. "I know how you must feel," he said.

Kendrick thought: So now the story was done; at last the case was solved. Those endless hours of the dreary night had not been spent in vain. The

boy was dead—though it was not murder—for murder consists of one human entity slaying another. And the boy had never been human. What he had truly been was difficult to define. But since he was certainly dead, that made a clean end of it. It was what he should have expected, Kendrick told himself. Not that he liked it now that he'd seen it. He had not liked seeing one piece here and another way over there. It was ugly. He had not enjoyed the blood one little bit. No. It had hurt—hurt deeply. Kendrick smiled at the sickness the sight had caused, as though within his own mess lay the seeds of a certain resurrection. Quietly, he mocked himself. He tried to sit.

"Come on," said Robert.

"No."

And Kendrick meant that: he would be coming no more. In seeking a killer, he had found only death. He stumbled away. Muttering. He danced down wooden steps, ignoring the necessities of balance, weaving a pattern through the dirt. Then the cracked paved street fell beneath his feet. Behind, the hill distantly dwindled; the tower was soon gone.

Kendrick sat in the long artificial grass at the side of the road. Stiff, taut blades of green scratched his bare arms and legs. He had done his duty. So now there could be no profound shame in the blossoming of a heartfelt sense of pride. It was done. Wasn't it?

AT TEN, Kendrick Drake appeared alone in the foyer outside the crime commissioner's office. He wore his uniform and carried, in one hand, a small brown bag. To the door, he murmured, "In," and entered when it opened.

Robert Martinez had arrived ahead of him. Commissioner Dodd occupied a big chair behind a wooden desk. At his side, seated in a small uncomfortable chair, was a man Kendrick had not seen before. This man was weeping.

Kendrick sat beside Robert. Who's that?" he asked.

"Our killer."

"Did he confess?"

"Yes."

The commissioner suddenly cleared his throat, then waited until everyone—including the weeping man—was affording him their undivided attention.

"It is my pleasure," the commissioner said, frowning, "to announce that the murder of Crosby Franklin has been solved. This gentleman has confessed to the deed. He has been adjudged guilty and duly sentenced into my care."

"And so?" Kendrick asked, politely.

"Oh, return him home," the commissioner said, waving a hand to indicate the inconsequence of the matter. "Let them take care of him." He glared at Kendrick. "But there is another matter."

"Yes, sir?"

"You, sir." The commissioner raised his folded hands, placed them upon his belly, then smiled brightly. "A charge has been lodged against you: harboring a known mutant."

"I see."

"So I'm afraid I must demand your badge. Until this matter has properly been resolved."

"I understand." Without hesitation, Kendrick removed the badge from his uniform and threw it. The glistening bit of polished tin slid across the commissioner's desk and landed in his lap. Turning to Robert, Kendrick said, "Thank you."

"Now wait," said Robert. "Don't

take this so seriously, Kendrick. You know the charge is merely a formality. You had that mutant because he was a witness. When you explain—"

"I won't explain."

"But—"

"Lose my position? I don't care."

The commissioner's face turned red. His jowls shook. Raising a finger, he waved it at Kendrick's nose. "You're talking pure rubbish, young man."

"Am I? Then let's talk about apprehending a murderer. The first in the history of this free city. Let's talk about anti-crime conditioning: the almost perfect system. Or is it? What if this city is no different from any other resilient substance when you force it into a ball and squeeze tighter and tighter. Eventually, a certain point is reached. Then what happens? It explodes—that's what—the pieces fly out—they scatter. I think you're about to have a crime wave—a murder wave—on your hands. I don't want to be here when it happens."

"Don't speak heresy in my presence, Drake. Even your father never dared that. We have caught our murderer. He is not a citizen of this free city."

"He never killed anyone."

"He confessed."

"I don't think even you believe that. Besides, I happen to know the identity of the real killer."

"Who?" said Robert.

"You," said Kendrick. Bending down, he opened the leather bag and, in a quick motion, removed its contents. He held the object in one hand, swiveling his wrist so that everyone could clearly see. The eyes were shut. Blood was thickly caked around the stump of the neck. The lips were also covered in red. "Crosby Franklin," said Kendrick. "The rest of him." He placed the head inside the bag. The room was quite still.

"You killed him," Kendrick told Robert. "I found the head in your dwelling unit. The knife, the ax."

The commissioner struggled to gain control of situation. "This is horrible rubbish. Since birth, Martinez has been conditioned so that crime is an impossible act for him."

"And what is crime? The revelers in North Beach—when they tear a little boy into pieces, is that a crime? And the third-degree in the Sunset who spit on me last night? What are they? Or Andrew Borah—who deliberately drove a woman to suicide? Or you, Mr. Commissioner? You who were so willing to see an innocent man suffer for a crime he never committed? Aren't you a criminal, too?"

"Get out of my sight," the commissioner said. But his heart was no longer in his words.

"It was an accident," Robert said, his voice careful and calm. "Didn't he deserve to die? Twenty years I've seen what they do up there and I couldn't stand it any longer. What he was doing to that woman. Borah told me all about it. He feeds me a lot of information. I watched Franklin, followed him, but what could I do? So I went to his dwelling unit. We talked. I had the knife. The blade was razor sharp. I waited until his back was turned. I shut my eyes and stood like a statue. I shouted at him to turn. He did. The blade cut his throat. He bled to death."

"An accident," Kendrick said. "But can you guess how I knew it was you?"

"No."

"Borah gave me a list—the names of suspects. There was only one name on that list, Robert. Yours."

"He did it deliberately," Robert

said.

"You were another of his players," Kendrick confirmed. He sensed it was over. He stood. "One more thing, Commissioner. Since I'm relieved of my job, I'd like to suggest a replacement." He nodded at Robert. "I think you'll need a chief like him in the future. He'll know how to fight."

Then he turned and went out the door and hurried down the corridor as if pursued by a thousand ghosts.

—GORDON EKLUND

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ON SALE IN APRIL FANTASTIC

POWER FAILURE by **CHARLES SHEFFIELD, NEMESIS PLACE** by **DAVID DRAKE, THE THREE-LEGGED CHICKEN** by **BRAD LANG, IN MEDIA RES** by **DAVID BISCHOFF, UNCOILING** by **LISA TUTTLE & STEVEN UTLEY, THE GOLDEN FLEECE** by **ARSEN DARNEY, MR. WHO?** by **DAVID R. BUNCH, HERE, FOR JUST A WHILE** by **BARRY MALZBERG, CHANGES** by **JAMES SALLIS.**

IN THE ARCADE

LISA TUTTLE

Lisa Tuttle returns with a new story fully as powerful as her controversial "Stone Circle" (March, 1976) and "Mrs.T." (Sept., 1976), and possibly even more staggering in its implications . . .

Illustrated by Joe Staton

Eula Mae woke. She peeled the sheet away from her perspiring body and sat up. Man, she was hot. The moon shone directly into the room through the uncurtained window, falling in a pool on the bed and giving the white sheets an almost phosphorescent glow against her dark skin.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed. It was strange to be awake so late at night. Everything was so still. Her husband slept silently in his half of the old, spring-shot bed. Eula Mae wondered what, in all this silence, could have awakened her.

It was odd, to be awake while everyone slept. She didn't think it had ever happened to her before. To go back to sleep seemed the only reasonable thing to do now, but she wasn't the least bit sleepy. She got up and walked to the window. That moon certainly was big and bright and low in the sky.

She put her palms flat on the rough, paint-peeling window sill, ducked her head beneath the sash and leaned out into the night. No lights gleamed from any of the crumbling tenements that lined the street, and only two street lamps shone—the rest stood darkly useless, bulbs shattered by children or angry drunks. Nothing moved. There was no sound. Eula Mae frowned slightly, and listened. The quiet wasn't natural—there should have been *some* sound, if only the far-away monster of traffic making itself heard. Did everyone and everything sleep without dreams? It was not natural; it was the stillness of a machine at rest, not the restless sleep of a city. She strained to hear the sounds she knew she should hear.

There! Was that. . . ? But now Eula Mae could not be certain. Had she heard that faint humming noise, or had she only felt the blood and breath traversing the highways of her own body?

Eula Mae sighed deeply and wondered how close to morning it was. She would not sleep again this night. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other and raised her eyes to the moon.

The sight of it shocked her, and shook the center of things. The known world, her world, ceased to be. The moon had always been there, she'd looked at it almost every night of her life. And now she looked up and saw not the familiar moon at all but a simulacrum, a falsehood, a stage moon: a light. Nor was that the night

sky it shone in—attached to an invisible ceiling, the light shone down through swaths of deep blue drapery. The familiar horizons became limited and strange. If that was not her moon, this could not be her city. Where was she?

"Howard," she said unhappily, turning back into the room. A cry for help. "Oh, Howard, wake up."

The still form did not stir. Eula Mae sat on the edge of the bed, which sagged still more under her weight, and put her hand on her husband's bare shoulder. His skin was smooth and cool.

Her lips formed his name again, but she did not speak it. She had suddenly comprehended just what was so unnatural about his stillness. He was not breathing.

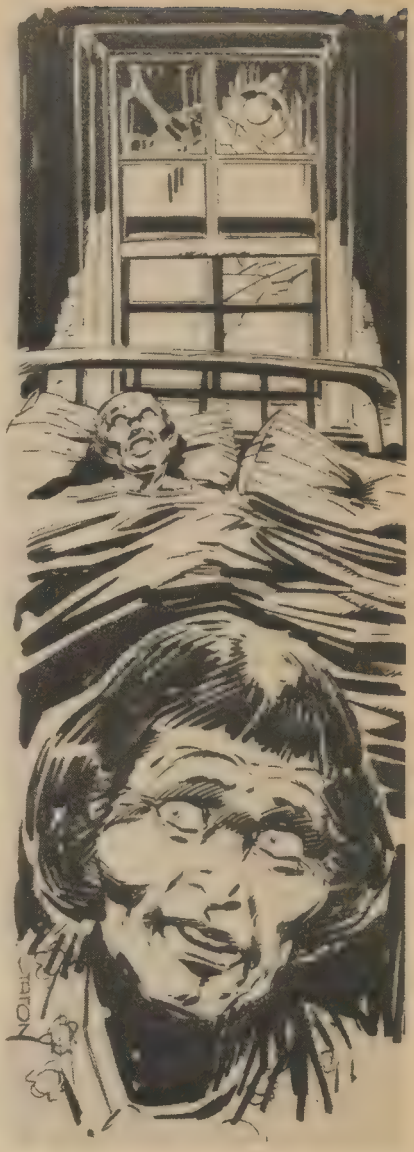
She moaned and began to shake him, trying to shake him back into life, to get him started again, knowing it was hopeless.

Oh, Howard. Howard. Howard.

He lay there like a doll, like a bolster on the bed, still and sleek and cool. He was somewhere very far away from the close heat of the room.

Eula Mae sat with her hands resting on her husband's body. Tears ran down her cheeks. She did not move. Perhaps, if she were still enough, she would go where Howard was. But the sobs forced themselves up from her gut, wrenched her body, made her shake.

Then the fear prevailed. The fear made her get up off the bed (slowly, trying not to jar the body), the fear made her stop crying. She had to go somewhere, she had to be with someone. She fumbled about in the big metal wardrobe, seeking her clean housedress, but it took too long, and the sagging, hanging door on the locker kept swinging inward, bumping



her, and the fear overruled all. She had to get out. She thought of her children, sleeping in the next room. She would take them and go to her sister's place.

The front room was dominated by the big bed where the children slept. Eula Mae noticed the wrongness as soon as she stepped through the door. There was no sound. Taddie's usual adenoidal snore didn't ripple the air—none of them, in fact, were breathing. She forced herself to go close to the bed, but she couldn't make herself touch them. If she touched them, felt them lifeless beneath her fingers, they would be turned into strangers for sure.

The facts were almost too stark to question. She wondered only why she, out of them all, had been permitted to awaken. Her mind searched restlessly, almost without her volition, for a prayer that would mean something.

Friends lived downstairs. She could go to them. The latch on the front door was stubborn, as always, but tonight it seemed a sinister stubbornness, locking her in deliberately in a room where everything once familiar had been changed to evil. The door finally, groaning querilously, opened to her, and she ran down stairs which tore with splintery mouths at her bare feet.

"Annie! George!" She pounded at their door. Her voice bounced from wall to wall in the ill-lit corridor and came back to her ears, thin and strange, frightening her so that she shut her mouth and used only her fists to call for help.

Nothing. Eula Mae was afraid to go out into the unnatural night, lit by the make-believe moon—this building was, at least, a known shelter—but she could not stay here among the dead. Her sister Rose Marie lived just up the street, in an identical tenement house, in a nearly identical two-room apartment. Her sister Rose Marie would take her in.

Eula Mae heard a scuttling sound. Roaches. Oddly, the sound was reassuring. It was familiar; it meant life here in this deathly still place.

She went into the street, not looking up. Her head was beginning to ache. She put her hand to her forehead, where the pain seemed to be centered, and felt the familiar imprint of the six-pointed star. She pulled her fingers away hastily, for their touch seemed to acerbate her headache. She remembered a radio program she'd heard once, about a woman who had fallen and bumped her head and then forgotten everything—who she was and where she lived. Could something like that have happened to her? But what could she possibly have forgotten that would make sense of all these changes in her world?

The door of Rose Marie's building always hung open, and Eula Mae entered the narrow little hallway nervously. The mailboxes on the right wall had been smashed into useless metal, and she was afraid every time she came here that someday whoever had smashed those boxes would be waiting to smash *her*.

As always, reprieved once more from a smashing, Eula Mae scurried up the creaking stairs as rapidly as she could without stumbling.

No one answered her calls or her poundings. No one in her sister's apartment, and no one up and down the hallway, although the sound must have been heard throughout the thin-walled building. Were they all gone? Frightened? Deaf? Could everyone be dead?

Finally, Eula Mae broke in the door to her sister's apartment. It was not difficult: Eula Mae was a powerfully built woman, although she did not think of herself as physically strong.

The front room was littered with children. One narrow cot held two, and the rest were on pallets on the floor. Eula Mae picked her way among them. She could hear no breathing, but did not want to investigate more closely.

A curtain separated the front room from Rose Marie and Jimmy's bedroom. Eula Mae pushed through the curtain and heard the welcome sound of soft snoring.

Her heart leaped with gratitude. "Rose Marie? Jimmy? Wake up!"

The slight, sibilant snore continued undisturbed. Eula Mae approached the bed. "Hey, get up!" she said loudly, and bent over her sister.

But no breath came from Rose Marie's nostrils, and no heartbeat disturbed the pink nylon ruffles of her negligee. Jimmy was snoring: he slept beside his dead wife. Eula Mae was outraged by this, and she leaned across the body of her sister and shook Jimmy's arm vigorously.

"You! Wake up! Quit that snoring and listen to me! Hear me? Wake up!"

Not even the rhythm of his snores altered. He slept on, as unreachable as Rose Marie.

Eula Mae straightened up and let her arms fall to her sides, realizing that she was quite alone. She was accustomed to making decisions, to running both her own life and the lives of other people, but she'd never been alone, and in a situation she flatly did not know how to handle.

She went back down the hall that reeked of long-forgotten meals, and down the treacherous stairs, and back into the deserted street. She would try to find someone, anyone, any friend or stranger to assure her that she was not the last person left alive; then they would decide what to do.

As she walked silent streets she remembered something her youngest brother had said. It might have been just another of the stories he loved to make up—just another of his innumerable horror stories about the omnipresent Whitey—or it might have been true.

"They've got a gas," he said. "They pipe it into rooms and kill everyone there. They tell us something like, 'this way to the showers' or, 'wait in this room till the doctor gets here' and then," his eyes glittered, "then they slip a tube under the door, or pump gas in through pipes in the vents and . . . a few little coughs, a choke or two you hardly notice and . . . zap . . . everybody's wiped out. Snuffed."

Eula Mae had been a little bit afraid of him when he told her that: he'd enjoyed the telling so much; he had looked gloating and sly, not much at all like her beloved little brother.

"That's the way the Man solves the nigger problem," he'd said cheerfully. "He just puts 'em all to sleep, like dogs with rabies."

When she came out of her reverie, Eula Mae saw that she had walked much farther than she would have thought possible. She had walked straight out of the city and into the countryside. She stepped from concrete onto a dirt road, and looked around in wonder. The sudden transition was mysterious; Eula Mae *knew* she could not have come so far in such a short time—true, she had been preoccupied, but she doubted she had walked even a mile yet. By all that

was logical, she should still be in the heart of the city. Yet she looked around, and her eyes gave her evidence of a cotton field, a watermelon patch just across the road, and some tumbledown wooden shanties a bit further away.

She walked on towards the shanties, and went right up to one. But then she hesitated before mounting the steps to the delapidated porch. A dog slept there, nose between his paws. Or did he sleep? The dog did not stir, nor give any sign that it knew she was there, staring at it. Had it indeed been a gas? Some mysterious gas, sprayed over all the areas where blacks lived? But if that were true, why had she lived on?

She walked past the shanty, continuing down the road, although her head hurt more with every step and she wanted to lie down somewhere, to rest, to be free of the pain that was knocking about inside her skull, burning a hole in her forehead. But she feared that if she rested she would never rise again.

So she walked on, she walked on—she walked quite suddenly into an invisible wall.

She backed off, staring stupidly at the horizon, at the moonlit dusty road which stretched before her. Then she tentatively stretched out a hand, and the hand went right through everything—the sky, the grass, the road, the distant shacks—and touched a hard, flat, smooth, invisible wall.

Eula Mae began to walk slowly alongside the wall, one hand outstretched and touching it to assure herself of its presence. She walked that way, following it, for some distance. It was eerie, seeing her hand pass through the landscape and touch something solid she could not see. But she did not have strength to spare for wondering. Her headache was almost overwhelming, and she had to fix all her attention upon moving, just moving. Reasons and answers would have to come later, if they ever came, just as rest would come later. For now she would have to move, because she was afraid to stop or turn back.

Once, Eula Mael looked to her right, away from the wall, and was startled to see that she was walking along a street only four blocks from where she lived. Why had she never tried to walk through the wall, towards the buildings that seemed to be there? Or had she? She could not remember. Perhaps it was not important to know if her universe had always been circumscribed by this wall, or if this was a recent change.

Abruptly the wall ended, projection merging with reality in a solid building. It was just another broken, dying tenement, like so many others in the neighborhood. This one was scarred with "Condemned" signs, and a door gaped blackly open.

Eula Mae hesitated a moment, the pain in her head holding her back like a brutal fist. She gasped slightly, and pushed herself through the doorway.

The hall it opened on was short and dark with a door closed at the opposite end. Eula Mae fumbled with the knob, and the door opened onto a blaze of light.

When she opened her eyes—slowly, against the pain of the headache and the glaring brightness—Eula Mae saw that she had opened a door leading into a wide, white-walled corridor lit by fluorescent ceiling panels. It was nothing from her world.

Eula Mae looked up and down the hall. White walls, punctuated by doors, stretched in either direction.

She saw no one, heard no one, and hesitantly entered the hall. She looked back at her door and saw, in stark black letters at the top of the doorframe, one word: NIGGERTOWN.

The pain in her head, which had become so persistent that she could almost ignore it, suddenly seared and stabbed with a new intensity. Eula Mae gnawed her lip to keep from whimpering. It was foolish to go on; foolish not to go home where she could lie down . . . but she thought of lying next to her dead husband, and knew she could not go back with nothing accomplished. If she was a fool, well, then, she was a fool. She would go on.

She walked away from Niggertown. She came to a door labled "Little Israel" and hesitated . . . and then walked on. Eula Mae saw that the corridor had a turning just ahead and her pace quickened.

At the turn, the hall opened into a large, circular gallery. It was empty of people. All around the walls projected booths or stalls, similar to those found at fairs and amusement parks of all sizes—the sort where tickets are sold and goods dispensed. And, as at a fair (and seeming to Eula Mae to be very much out of place in this clean, large, empty, well-lit hall) each booth was decorated with garish signs and posters, each proclaiming the particular attraction to be purchased at that booth.

"Niggertown"—the word garish in red and black—caught her eye, and she let herself be drawn to that booth.

Clowns in black-face. It was a depiction Eula Mae was accustomed to. Thick-lipped, pop-eyed, fuzzy-headed darkies. Mammies with their babies, little pickaninnies, young bucks in overalls strumming banjos.

SEE, shouted the caption above one picture. "Customs held since tribal days in darkest Africa!" Above a cartoon of soulful darkies looking heavenward was the suggestion: "Join the happy darkies in heartwarming 'spirituals' and sing your blues away!"

Centered amid all the garish drawings was a box set in a bold typeface. Eula Mae read it, her lips moving slightly as she grappled with each word.

"Guaranteed Satisfaction! Observe first-hand a vanished way of life. See them tremble before you, the hated 'honky'—OR, for the thrill of a lifetime, never to be forgotten, SEE LIFE THROUGH BLACK EYES! Yes! Our surrogate people are so real, so lifelike, that only a trained expert can tell the difference. Plug right in and instantly you see, hear, smell, taste and feel just as you can in your own body. Walk among them undetected in an android nigger body—they'll accept you as one of the 'tribe', never suspecting, while you—"

Voices. They cut through her confusion and the pain in her head. Eula Mae was frozen like a rabbit before headlights. Which way to run? People—she had been looking for people, but what if—

Caution won. She stumbled behind the poster-bedecked booth, crouched, and waited.

Clicking footsteps: bootheels. Eula Mae peered around the side of the booth, and terror flowed over her as she saw who was there.

Two white men, fine, blond, strong, Aryan types. The pride of the world. One wore coveralls and carried a tool-kit; the other was a guard of some kind, in a grey and black uniform, swastikas shining discretely from his shoulders.

The worker was complaining; the

(cont. on page 96)

Steve Miller is of the Baltimore Millers, and should not be confused with any other Steve Millers, musical or otherwise. He is a published poet and this story is his first professional science-fiction sale. It will surely not be his last . . .

CHARIOTEER

STEVE MILLER

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

MICHAEL has been watching me again. Lori doesn't watch so hard, or with as much of that strange combination of fear and contempt that Michael manages to dredge up from the sand within his mind. It's been a long time since he loved me, I think, and even longer since he loved his father. Lori, at least, understands that love and loyalty don't always go the same direction.

Knowing that I will be at my desk at noon to take the reports from the area managers, Michael will come to me. Look at last week, look at yesterday.

"MOTHER, I spoke with the Doctor earlier." Always he pauses for dramatic effect; you would think to listen to him that he could be a good orator . . . but he lacks the will.

"Yes?" I said as I waited for the rental reports and the sales totals to finish coming in.

"Mother, the Doctor said he doesn't expect Father to last out the week."

Michael was born of stone and sand and bad cement—you can see it in the way his subtleties fail. I cannot really believe, sometimes, that he is my child, the child of my blood and sweat and the blood and sweat of a wasted man sleeping in an antiseptic room eight or ten miles from here. Where is that passion that brought him to motion twenty five years ago? Damn you stone, go away, you have no granite in you. You are all marble, worried more about the polish than the weakness below. Very well, be marble, but I will not trust you as a bridge. *I will not trust you.*

"Mother, are you listening to me?"

"Yes, Dear, I hear you. You were telling me that my mate will be dead and buried before the end of the month."

"Mother!"

"Yes?"

"I spoke for a moment with Father. He still insists he will go through with this—this insanity. He told me that it's in the will. Do you know how much it will cost? And for what? We won't even have a stone to visit or a place to plant flowers. Some of my friends have told me, well, they think that Father could be declared insane."

I let my arms down, consciously wishing them limp at my sides. I even let my pencil drop to the floor.

My neck and shoulders, they cannot take the tension any longer. I don't have the strength I once had, back when David and I would spend a night exchanging massages. Not now, not for this.

"Michael, if he wants it this way, if he has put it in his will, if your Father wants his body flung off into space instead of being buried to putrify and satisfy the worms, how can you be opposed to that? It is *his* money, this is *his death*. Let him go where he wants and take what he wants with him."

"Mother, I know you're part of this too, you and John What's-His-Face. You always pushed him toward space, even after the accident. Mother, I spoke with someone at Farrarego's office. They told me how much a "simple" eternal orbit funeral would cost. When I asked about a stellar funeral they wanted to refer me to something called special projects . . ."

He paused then, to get his breath. I ignored the signal bell on the terminal; I could call up the information when he left.

"Mother, it costs ten thousand dollars just to have the ashes dumped between the Earth and the moon. It costs fifty thousand dollars to have the ashes put into Mars orbit. Ashes, Mother!" he screamed.

Taking stock again for a moment he continued more quietly. "Mother, the eternal orbit, for a complete body, in a Neptune to Pluto orbit, costs over five hundred thousand dollars, and Father told me, he was bragging to me, that this would cost more than that, and Mother, we don't even get a place to put flowers. All we get is a chart once a week to show us where he is until he gets outside the solar system. And what do we do, invite all the important people, the President

and the U.N. people down to Florida for a rocketside service?"

"Michael, stop it!"

His hair, Michael's, is almost the same color as David's was when I met him, and there is some resemblance in the face. But I never, not once, saw David cower that way, not to anybody.

Now he continued earnestly. "Can't we, I mean Lori already asked you, but consider it please, can't we just arrange for a full burial at sea—that's close to going into space . . ."

He chokes on that, Michael does. It's the vision of his Father actually escaping from this place of dust and mud. I sometimes think to threaten him with turning the family burial plot into a launch pad; but he would only rant for awhile.

I caught my breath a little, and my shoulders weren't so tired any longer, so I sat up straighter, and just looked at him. Pitiful, begging, flesh of my flesh.

"Go away stone," I told him. "Go away. We shan't discuss this any longer."

I could not discuss it any longer with stones.

THAT WAS last Tuesday. He came again the next day, with a lawyer, to tell me his lawyer friend thought that the will might be broken. I said to him "And the contracts, the construction?" and was quiet. They left me.

Outside now it is dark. Murky, David would say. A hundred times or more I saw him at the window, looking up at the Virginia sky, muttering to himself as he twirled his pen in the three fingers of his right hand, muttering, "I can't see the stars tonight. Not tonight."

Sometimes they still hold the tests at Wallops Island, shooting strange chemicals into the air to turn the sky red or green; David would love to watch the shimmering; almost always he would recount the story of how John Farrarego had hidden a small can of something in the spaceship and painted the sky violet over New York, just for fun.

No, the contracts cannot be broken. John and I and the lawyers for Space resources, we've looked them over, and they can't be broken. Basically they say that upon the demise (how odd the choice of words we have to describe that breath, that first breath that we *don't* breathe, the choice and the number are staggering) of David Arthur Vernon his remains will be accorded the honor due the former Chief Executive of the United States and that thereafter, his remains shall be launched into interstellar space on a craft, probe, or device which shall traverse the area between the solar system and the star system known as Alpha Centauri and there deliver the remains unto the surface of the planet most approximating Earth; lacking such a planet the probe shall cause the remains to be placed into an eternal orbit about said star."

It can be done. David still has not decided how he will go: dust, ashes, or former flesh. He will go, one way or another. If he goes as ashes we can get more instrumentation on the probe, or perhaps a higher velocity. Does it come down to this so easily, that I have already accepted his dying and worry now only of how his casket carries him?

Our room here. *My* room. It is filled with David, but John is always in the background. The bottles on the display case—three of them—all reflect John as well as David. With all the certificates and plaques and memories, the bottles are among his

favorite things. Earth, Moon, and Mars, dust from each place.

The Moon dust is from John's first landing, and it has become a common souvenir among the friends of astronauts. The Mars dust, that too is from John, courtesy of Space Resources, John's company. The moonstuff is a little green-gray, with some pebbles. The Mars dust is a bit red, like a beach sand with a little rust in it.

The Earth dust? David collected that himself a few months after the accident: it is a small bottle full of sand, bits of concrete, and fused glass, all from the launch pad. David claims there are bits of him in this bottle, in all of the bottles.

David has spoken with a few of his friends about this, and Michael in his stony search for pity has mentioned the launch idea to a few of his cohorts—perhaps it is a wonder that none of them have spread it any further. I thank the stars that most people still don't know, that most of America and many of our friends will not be able to put pressure on David for his decision on which way to go to the stars. Most everyone expects David, like all the other Presidents, to die and be put on display, lie in state in the Capitol and then to be buried in the dirt of home. The TV stations have been told to expect a last taped speech from the President; I think they hunger for it, for David was a popular President. It is a simple speech where David reminds everyone that he dedicated his life to spaceflight, that the foot and fingers lost in the accident at the Cape didn't stop him from wanting to go.

He said "I hope you understand, I hope you forgive an old man his whim and know that I would rather not be buried in a steel box and stared at; I had enough of being stared at as President, and before that as part of the program. I was never allowed into space while I lived, while my friends and colleagues traveled to the planets, leaving me behind. Now, I will leave them behind, and you. Please accept my decision for what it is—my chance to go a-voyaging finally. That is my will. Thank you, and may you all follow your dreams where they lead."

I know it by heart. Three days it took David to write it, and two days to tape it, short as it is. I wrote it all down myself, scratching out the words when they needed to be changed, nearly dying each time David would wheeze with that chatter-cough breath. The lungs are going and the wounds from the fire and flame and liquid oxygen breathing when the Saturn blew up don't help; probably the stations will put on that film of David sliding down the wire carrying John like so much luggage. I was so close then, and when the explosion came and ripped to shred and wires all of that rocket, I knew that David was dead. Two days later when they finally opened the safe-place under the pad with all those yards of concrete and steel, it was John who was up and about and David dying. You can't pilot a spaceship without fingers, without toes.

John and I became friends then, and since then there have always been rumors about us. I caught the need from David and John; we will go, David will go. We need stars. David, retired and then running for office and winning, kept us in space. John, with the idea of funerals in space and factories on the moon, with these he is financing the starship.

Last Thursday I went to see David, and haven't seen him since. I won't see him alive I think. I could not

watch him die again—three times after the accident I was there when his heart or lungs stopped—I could not watch him die and not live again. But Thursday I went to visit.

I wore my quiet green pants suit because I knew Michael would be there, and the reporters.

"Mrs. Vernon, excuse me but the rumor is that the President (and *why, why* do they call him President and not Astronaut these fifteen years after his term in office is over?) is dying of cancer. Can you comment?"

I almost ran from the car, a fast paced walk that the cameramen know how to catch—you cannot avoid the camera when a President is dying.

"Danny," I said to a friend in the crowd, "tell them that emphysema has been aggravated by the smog problems. He's resting quietly."

Danny, a short man with greying hair and a constant smile, grimaced—he knew how bad the last attack had been. He shook his head in assent and I waded through the rest of the crowd to the door.

At the door, a nurse in hospital blue.

"I'm sorry, only family are allowed . . ."

I turned to see who might be following me. A man with clipboard was close behind. I hadn't heard his voice in the din outside.

"That's okay nurse, he's here to help with some of the arrangements."

She nodded us past the door and through the small hall to the elevator. She left us at the door and I embraced John as soon as the doors slid closed; I was surprised by the amount of energy I put into it. Thinking about it now I realize that I hadn't been able to hug David for a month, even then.

"I'm sorry," I said, all out of breath with the run and the embrace, "I didn't hear you out there."

He held my arms as the doors opened. "I wasn't calling—I knew you'd let me in."

Shaking the hair back out of his face and shrugging, he took his coat off. "All things considered we're in good shape" he said. "I've got news for you and for David too."

The suite consists of several white rooms and a lounge. This is called, so I've heard from the staff, the terminal suite. Terminal phase. Words, phrases, they divorce you from meaning sometimes, they save you from hurt. David will be engaging in the Terminal Activity soon. He will die.

They are drugging him carefully; waking him when they know the family will be there, sedating him when we leave. They submerge him with drugs until he barely knows someone is there. I've seen him that way before, twenty five years ago. Sometimes he knows names and faces; like a cheap autoreceptionist he's turned on only when the guests come.

No, I guess that's not quite true, for we get reports on him; already we have reports on the journey to the stars. The Doctors are constantly, cautiously hopeful. They will not give up, and David has will power. David also has plans. He will leave them all behind soon and go on to what he has been waiting for so long. Lucky man, at least he knows that this part of his dream will come through.

The rest of the suite, outside of the white rooms, maybe the lounge you could call it, is carpeted and quiet. The place is solemn, but not with that facile solemnity of a funeral home or a spirit palace; this feeling is closer to one of the Presidential waiting rooms.

"Come sit over here, Beth, and I'll show you why I came."

We sank deep into one of the comfortable couches and he placed his clipboard on the glass table in front of us, almost knocking the fake flowers on the floor. Maybe twenty five or thirty feet from us, David was dying, and Michael was talking with him. Ignoring the flowers, John put the film into the clipboard's viewer.

"There are several things for David to smile about today. For one, we have the final Companion built and tested."

The clipboard showed us a spacecraft that looked like an elongated football. There were no panels of solar cells—of what use would they be in interstellar space? It was not a pretty craft with its odd shape and three extensions of crab-claw metal breaking the curves.

"Now look at this shot."

"Ah." What else could I say?

The picture was of the same spacecraft from a distance of several miles. The main body was a tiny dot, around it was a flare of thin wires that made the whole thing look like a cosmic butterfly.

"We tested the communication webbing last week, and then reeled it down. It's all set."

He changed pictures, showing the same craft from several angles.

"The engineers have decided that we should have one of these trailing, once interstellar travel is attained, and the other should be leading after about four years—we're sure that we can get the launch right from the Chariot."

"And the monitors?" I asked.

"The last eight eternal orbit probes have actually been monitors, and the next four are scheduled for eccentric orbits that will give us maximum coverage in case the Chariot passes through or near dust or gas. Two will be set up to receive only on the Companion frequency, the rest will be set for both. In case of any major problems we hope that the Companion closest will be able to manuever enough to let us have a look at things."

"Then the network?" I asked. John's eyes were bright on mine—they are almost exactly the same color as David's.

"Is almost ready" he answered. "In fact, the net has taken over all the reception functions for Northstar. Which is something else David will want to know about.

"Garmen will be the first true astronaut in about three weeks. We expect him to pass through the theoretical Pluto distance then. I know David arranged everything for Garmen, and even, I think, helped Garmen stay convinced right there near the end when he was in such pain. Now that his wife's dead too I guess there's no one but us and David to be glad for him."

I shook my head in agreement. Northstar was the predecessor to the Chariot, not much more than a probe converted to carry a light weight casket to the stars. Eventually, in a million years or so, if the craft remained intact and the galaxy didn't visit some odd happening upon it, Northstar will reach the general vicinity of Polaris, with Garmen's body—surely ashes by then—the main cargo. The craft will broadcast information to us for a few years, descriptions of magnetic fields, ion and plasma counts, dust information . . . everything that we begin to need to know with the starships building. But the Northastar is passive, except for the radio; the Northstar has no onboard computer and engines, no ability to move itself out of the way of trouble, no helm to answer to at all.

When I glanced down at the board again, a new picture had taken its place on the screen; familiar and strange at once, the Chariot, as a finished ship and not a painting or model. The most expensive funeral chariot ever built David had called it once; thereafter the name stuck, was taken to, and now is appropriate; the Chariot will take the remains of David far from this lonely place and me, horseless.

There it is, hanging in space, looking all unfinished, steel pipes and long dark booms—how different it is from the glitter machines NASA builds . . . how different from that gold-plated and gilt-edged machine that blew up on the pad. In the center of the device there is a small cargo area for the coffin . . . or the vial of ashes. If David will go as ashes we get more instrumentation. This whole thing makes me sound like an engineer, but I've been living with the dreams of stars for a long time. If David will go as ashes it might mean that I can go on the starship, or at least people of my children's generation. So many things we still need to know about where we're going from here . . .

John put the clipboard through its paces for me, showing the Chariot from several directions, zooming in to point out the extra engines—the free engines donated to the trip by Space Resources—and the experimental engine that might also make the difference.

Look. There are things about this that David doesn't know, things we haven't said to him. Instead of one engine, which he paid for, there are four. Three of them are identical. Any one of the three can boost the Chariot up to .3 lights within a few years. With the three of them and the boost they'll get from the strap-on rockets waiting in Mars orbit the Chariot will be moving at about .57 lights four years after it leaves the solar system. *Almost* fast enough for a manned crew to make a round trip if they weren't worried about the long trip back and the fact that they would be ancient by the time they managed to find enough material to build a return vehicle. But if the fourth engine works, if the experiment comes off, then the Chariot will get up to .8 lights, and at that speed the time dilation becomes significant—allowing for acceleration and deceleration a round trip to Alpha Centauri could be made in under twelve years ship-time.

If the engine doesn't work, either the Chariot will continue on at .57 lights or it will be a cloud of dust somewhere outside Pluto's orbit.

"This," John told me, "is the progress we've had on the Spine. It hasn't been going quite as fast as we'd hoped it would, but everything has been on crash priority for the Chariot so I guess we can't complain about that."

The Spine is the start of the manned star ship. We're really not sure what it will look like when it gets done—that will depend on the engines, and which ones work. We can start though, knowing how many people we want to send and how much acceleration they can take.

"Tell him, tell him that they've been doing a lot of engineering on it," I said, "because he wants it to be built right. He'll appreciate that."

John was about to go when the door opened to the white room, and Michael walked out, talking to the Doctor.

He nodded curtly in our direction as the Doctor finished his say and then bore down upon us.

"Mr. Farrarego, Mother."

He was pale in the face and quiet.

John motioned him to be seated.

"No thanks, I'll have to be going soon." He worked his face around to a defiant look.

"Mother, I spoke with Father about the funeral."

Of course he had. Stones have no soul at all.

"Both of you will want to know that Father told me that he absolutely refuses to cancel this launch thing. He said it would disappoint the pair of you too much, if he wanted to change his mind." There was hate - there somehow, but why? I know he didn't love his Father anymore; how could he, being so weak and arrogant?

"But he told me to tell you that he would think about the cremation thing. I pointed out that if he was going to go to the stars he might just as well still look like a man when he got there. I think he will tell you what he wants to do when you go in now."

Michael was gone, his small triumph buoying his walk.

We went to speak to David. David and the machines actually, for there were so many things connected with him, the dials and the controls looked like a space ship cabin.

For ten minutes we talked of nothing with the nurses and doctors hovering over the bed and us while the technicians in the other room peered through the glass window that looked over David's bed. He was the act and they the audience: they were just waiting for him to happen.

John told of the Russian probes that snooped the Chariot and the Spine.

David grinned. "Did they tell anyone yet that they are building a star ship?" His breath was short, raspy.

John shook his head. "Not that I know of."

"Well, I guess they must know that with the monitors and probes we've got all over the place that they can't keep a secret if they talk about us . . ." David broke off for a few moments before beginning on Michael's visit.

"Michael asked me to be buried," he said bluntly. "I told him no." He smiled up at both of us.

"However," he said in a way that reminded me of all the televised speeches, and the cartoons too, "however, I told him I would think on the idea of not being cremated. He has a point there I think. Suppose, well, suppose I get there and someone's waiting for me, or something. What will they know about me from a pile of dust in a bottle? What would I be worth to either us or them as a pile of dust in a bottle? If I go as dust why should I go at all? It would be just as well then to add another instrument or another pound of fuel."

He coughed for a moment causing the technicians to glance at their instruments and the doctors to glance to the technicians. One of the doctors listened intently to his intercom looking for all the world like the Victrola dog listening for his master's voice. David grinned again.

"I do that once in a while to keep them on their toes. I told one of the nurses earlier that I know what happens around here whenever they sedate me—they all relax again until I wake up."

David reached for my hand. His hand felt withered and cold. His grasp was light for all of the obvious effort he put in to it.

"Beth, tell me, is that asking too much, that I should want to be me when I get there? I want them, whoever finds me, to know that it was my

spaceship, and that I owned it, and that *I* caused it to be built, and that *I* made the trip myself!" He almost pleaded.

"Isn't that pretty much the way we've always planned it?" I asked. "When you told me the idea that night you first got back from the hospital, when you found out you'd missed Chang's funeral, isn't that what you told me you were going to do one day?"

He smiled and nodded. Coughing again he caused another flurry among the doctors and their watchmen.

"John, come here."

John leaned close by David to receive a whispered word or two and nodded a serious assent.

One of the watchmen and a nurse came toward us making the usual motions of dismissal out of David's range of vision. We small talked our way out of the room. The last thing I saw in that room was a nurse with a needle injecting David into sleep.

John turned to me as we walked toward the elevator. "David told me that you shouldn't come too often anymore—he says you look at him the way you did after the accident, when you thought he was going to die."

MICHAEL will not come to me today at noon as I sit at my desk. He and Lori are at the hospital; waiting. Sometime soon David will cease being my man.

I wait for the phone to ring. The first call will be Michael—somehow I didn't expect him to be there at a time like this, but he wanted to go. I will stay here, because I've already seen David die once or twice. I know what it's like. I will wait for the second phone call.

When John calls he will ask me a question. Just a few words. And I will sit in this room where David lived, look out at the sky, be it day or night, and see stars.

Neither David nor Michael nor Lori will be here when I say, "Ashes, John, it has to be ashes."

John will say yes, and send me some sand and ashes to put in the fourth bottle, the one David scribbled Alpha Centauri on.

I don't think I'll let Michael see the bottle. Lori, at least, understands about loyalty.

—STEVE MILLER

(cont. from page 87)

guard listening with a slight smile curling his lips.

"It's just that it's so damn unnecessary. It's an unnecessary expense to maintain real people—the public wouldn't know the difference if we replaced 'em all with androids. It'll have to be done eventually, when they die out, so why not replace 'em all right now? The surrogates wouldn't give us this kind of trouble."

"You're probably right," said the guard. "The public wouldn't know—the public is very gullible. But the Old Man himself sometimes comes around here . . . he'd know . . . he likes . . ."

"*He* comes *here*?" asked the other in awe.

The guard frowned at being interrupted. He had stopped walking in order to speak his piece, and he expected the other to be properly respectful of his words.

"Yes. This is one of the last places you can see such things . . . most other arcades are composed entirely of surrogates. Some of them very fine, true, but not the real thing. And to some, like the Old Man, having the

(cont. on page 118)

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY BABY

Readers who recall Vol's first story for us, "An Animal Crime of Passion" (March, 1977), will not be prepared for the grim realism of this one . . .

VOL HALDEMAN

THE PACK was hunting. They ran from tree to tree along the edges of the forest, muttering in low tones. The tall one, Mar-ee, found the scent.

Mar-ee led them towards the ravine. The smell of urine on the trees was very strong now, the dogs had passed this way only minutes before. The urge to hunt was strong in her. She saw a movement through the trees—*dog!*

She lunged forward, teeth bared, snarling. She raised her spear high and rushed the dog, expecting it to turn and run. She would spear it in the hindquarters as it fled, as the mother had taught her.

The dog crouched low, held its ground, growled menacingly. *Wait.* Mar-ee approached cautiously. The rest of the women hung back, hiding behind trees, peering out.

Suddenly the dog sprang towards her. She pointed her spear at it, *my way.* It caught the dog in the throat, held . . . the dog was skewered, still thrashing, barking. The hunter dropped the spear immediately and picked up a fist-sized rock. *Kill.* She struck three times and the skull was crushed, the dog finished. She let the dog lay, stepped over it to see what it had been defending.

The other women came out to examine the kill. Mar-ee turned on them with a snarl.

"Mine!" she said raspingly. She watched them suspiciously as they clustered around, poked at the dog excitedly, jumped away.

The dog had been guarding a pocket made by two fallen trees. *What there?* Mar-ee grabbed suddenly, grinned widely. She drew out three puppies, squirming whimpering bundles of fur. One by one she wrung their necks. She held them in her arms triumphantly as she rejoined the group.

The others fell back, smiling, calling softly. She gestured for them to pick up the dog and follow her. They would eat well today.

THE OLD FEMALE hurried out of the hut to see what the hunters had brought. The two males watched from their place at the edge of the clearing. Saliva dripped from the slack mouth of the older male at the sight of the meat. He smiled submissively at the tall one, slipped up to her, patted her arm. She ignored him and approached the old woman.

Mar-ee stared hard into the mother's eyes. The old one looked back at her calmly, unafraid. Mar-ee dropped her gaze.

"Good," the old woman muttered. "Good girl to bring meat."

Mar-ee reluctantly handed her a puppy, withdrew. She turned to the others and angrily gestured for them to drop the dog. She sat crosslegged in front of it with the remaining puppies in her lap. *Soon old one dead. Mar-ee be the mother.*

She removed her spear from the dog's throat and used it to split the belly skin. She reached in and pulled out the liver, dropped it on top of the puppies. She tore the heart loose with both hands. The rest of the women watched, pushing and shoving, jostling for position near the meat.

The child wandered up, whining, begging. She was a little girl about three years old. Mar-ee held out a tidbit to her and the baby snatched it, lost her balance, sat down on the ground with a thump. She held the piece close to her body and bent her head down to bite into it. The others moaned excitedly.

The hunter severed the head of the dog and reached into the crushed skull for a handful of brains. *Ah.* When she closed her eyes to savor the taste, the women took it as a signal. They rushed forward and tore at the carcass with their bare hands, ripping off limbs and chunks of muscle. They retreated a few feet sat gorging themselves, gnawing at the meat and bones, sucking their fingers.

When she finished scooping out the brains, Mar-ee passed the skull to the old woman. The old one cackled, patted Mar-ee's hand. She spit into the skull, took a hank of her stringy gray hair and dipped it in to soak up the residue, sucked it off. She smacked her lips loudly over it.

They gorged themselves until there was nothing left of the dog but bones and skin. Mar-ee carefully rolled up the puppies in the largest piece of skin.

"Mine!" she repeated loudly. Everyone smiled. They threw the bones to the males.

THE YOUNGER MALE approached Mar-ee, grinning, sidling up to her, reaching out to comb his hands through her snarled hair. She pushed him away. He sat back, running his hands rapidly over his penis, calling out softly. When Mar-ee looked towards him, he rolled onto his back, presenting his erection, making thrusting movements.

Mar-ee looked over at the old woman. She had closed her eyes, dozing, her head sagging forward. The male called softly again, so the tall one went to him. She squatted over him and pushed his penis into her, sitting down hard on him, her knees on either side of his body. He thrust at her eagerly but she held him down with a hand on his chest and rubbed her vulva rapidly back and forth across his pubic hair. Then she began to move up and down on his penis, letting him push his hips forward. *Fuck. Fuck.* She panted, moaned. Sweat ran in dirty rivulets down her swollen body. When she came she cried out and threw her head back, exposing her throat.

The male pushed at her a few more times and grunted, came. He lay quietly, shoulders hunched, grinning slyly. Mar-ee didn't look at him. She climbed off and went back to her food.

Mar-ee took her food into the hut and hit it under a bundle of furs and branches. Leaning against it, she picked up a stubby branch and began rubbing herself with it. *Ah.* She rubbed it back and forth between her legs, getting it slimy with the male's

semen, rubbing slowly. She had closed her eyes and was unaware that the old woman had followed her into the hut until she grabbed the stick away.

Mar-ee jumped to her feet, snarling angrily. Then she saw it was the old woman and she stopped, smiled submissively, sat back down. She watched unhappily as the mother sniffed the stick, grunted in satisfaction, and began to masturbate herself with it.

MAR-EE stood outside the hut. Urine trickled down the insides of her legs, *warm, good.* The moon was pale, the forest dark, shadowed.

The mother called to her to come in. She muttered. The mother called louder. Mar-ee reluctantly obeyed. *Old woman fears dark.*

The old one frowned at her as she joined the others.

"Bad girl," she said. "There is danger at night. The city devils eat you at night."

Mar-ee sat down, sulked. There was more, but Mar-ee didn't understand the words. The old one told them stories that her mother had told her. The old one's mother had once lived in the city, she said. *Old woman fears.*

The other women huddled together, preparing to sleep. The old woman went to her place, touched her bundle of skins and hidden food, curled up with it. Mar-ee automatically moved to her place, but did not lay down. She squatted against the wall of the brush hut, listening to the night sounds. She heard birds and small animals, heard the males moving about in their place behind the hut, heard the wind moving through the trees. *No devils.*

MAR-EE was strangely restless all night. When the sun rose she called impatiently to the women to go and hunt. They were all still sluggish, torpid from feeding well the day before. They grumbled and groaned, but Mar-ee made them get up.

She took them at a fast pace through the forest. They went farther than usual, almost to the edge of the safe land, where they could see the remains of the ruined city. *No.* Mar-ee refused to let them rest, kept them moving although they saw no dogs, no rats. Towards the middle of the day she stopped near a stream and they all kneeled down to drink. When Mar-ee bent down she gave a muffled moan. *Hurts.*

She led them on in a wide circle. By mid-afternoon her steps faltered. They had still not seen any animals to hunt. Mar-ee was panting, hesitating. They stopped, muttering, confused.

Mar-ee sank down with her back against a tree. Her pants came louder. *Mother!* Suddenly she grunted, squatted with her legs wide apart, and birthed a baby.

She looked at it lying on the leaves of the forest floor curiously. She picked up the twisted umbilical cord and methodically chewed through it, then grabbed up the baby. She held it in one hand and carefully patted it all over with the other, starting with the face and moving downwards. When she patted the genitals she poked a finger into the vagina. Satisfied that the baby was normally shaped, she held it to her chest and bound it against herself with a strip of vine.

The baby's instincts took over and she nuzzled, found the nipple, sucked. Mar-ee kicked some leaves over the afterbirth, took up her spear again, and urged the women to move on. *She knew! Keep the babies like*

you. The mother told her. When she be the mother, she tell them. Kill the males.

THEY ARRIVED at the hut by sunset. Mar-ee's baby lay sleeping, a comfortable weight against her side. No one came out of the hut to greet them.

Mar-ee looked inside carefully. The old woman had let the two males in. They were all sleeping. Their bloody, greasy faces and the bones spread around them told her that they had eaten her puppies. Mar-ee clenched her fists and raced into the hut.

"Mine!" she screamed in rage. She kicked out at the males, shoving them aside. She took her spear and put it to the old woman's throat, pushed. The mother stirred and tried to get up. Mar-ee pushed harder. She looked and saw fear in the old woman's eyes this time, knew it was the end for her. She pulled the spear away and cuffed the old woman contemptuously.

The old one hung her head meekly. The tall woman would lead the tribe now. She would make the old woman bring her food, clean her body, dig her roots. The old woman smiled fearfully at her.

Mar-ee untied the vine that lashed the baby to her chest and handed her to the old woman. She threw the vine after her. The old one obediently tied the baby next to her own withered breasts. She went over to her cache of food and pulled out a hoarded marrow bone to present to the tall one. Mar-ee accepted the bone and patted the old woman on the shoulder. *Good.*

AFTER ONLY a few days Mar-ee's baby was dead, starved. The old woman was afraid to let the tall one know, so she carried the dead baby lashed to her body even though parts began to fall off. One day Mar-ee casually reached out and plucked an arm off the baby and chewed on it with relish, burped contentedly. *It was good, very good.*

—VOL HALDEMAN

(cont. from page 61)
ought to do more about it, boys."

"Well, that's fine. You see, our little group exists to be sure that the Futurist Party gets a fair shake. If some Tri-Vision commentator, or whoever, gets a little too snotty in what he says about the party, or Mr. Simonsen, then we kind of put a little pressure to bear."

"I'm right with you, Comrade," Pitt said, "but just how do you mean?"

The spokesman turned to his confederate. "Show him, Jerry."

Jerry, a bit abashed, brought from his hip pocket a set of brass knucks and fitted them affectionately to his right hand.

The spokesman said earnestly, "Of course, seeing how you feel, Jerry'll never give *you* any trouble, Mr. Temple, but we just thought we'd let you know that we'll be reading your column. In fact," he added thoughtfully, "I think Mr. Simonsen is already looking around for some good speech writers for the campaign. Maybe you'd do."

—MACK REYNOLDS

Tom Perry's guest editorial in our July, 1977, issue and Sam Moskowitz's response to that guest editorial in the October, 1977, issue are but prologues for the article which follows. (Perry's response to Moskowitz can be found in our letters column this issue.) Here, at last, the true story about Hugo Gernsback's loss of control over the magazine he founded AMAZING STORIES*—is unfolded for the first time . . .*

AN AMAZING STORY: EXPERIMENTER IN BANKRUPTCY

TOM PERRY

I TOOK a deep breath and pushed keys on my telephone. A secretary answered and put me through to her boss. I identified myself over the long-distance line to New York and then asked:

"Is this the Robert Halpern who was involved in the bankruptcy of the Experimenter Publishing Company in 1929?"

"What was the name of the company? Experimenter? Yes—yes, you have the right man. What can I do for you?"

I breathed relief. My search was over. I was talking to the last survivor of the men who—nearly half a century ago—had saved the first science-fiction magazine from folding. Without them, AMAZING would never have survived to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, and SF as we know it today probably would not exist at all.

And yet none of them had any interest in science fiction. These men were businessmen, lawyers, accountants, and bankers; pioneers in their own fields, but not starry-eyed SF fans. Saving SF had not been their goal—only a fortuitous by-product of a knotty bankruptcy case that went to the Supreme Court and became a legal landmark.

Currently there are two schools of thought about Hugo Gernsback. Some revere him as "the father of science fiction" for having founded AMAZING in 1926; other claim that by doing so, he walled SF into a literary ghetto from which it is only now emerging.

Whichever side you take in this controversy, you might like to know that it almost didn't happen. Unlike the literary opinions cited above, this is not a matter that can be argued. It is hard, cold fact—it can be checked by anyone willing to take the time and trouble and capable of facing the facts.

The true story has never been told in any of the various histories of science fiction. And it probably never would have come to light at all except for a strange, looking-glass version

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that has been promulgated by Sam Moskowitz, a former employee of Gernsback's.

I first saw the Moskowitz version in a book called *A Pictorial History of Science Fiction*, by David A. Kyle, published in 1976. A longer account appears in Moskowitz's own book, *Explorers of the Infinite*, published in 1963. The Moskowitz version first saw print as an article in 1959—fully three decades after the bankruptcy—and Moskowitz says he got it from Gernsback himself.

The punchline of the Moskowitz version has always relied for its impact on the reputation of America's foremost newspaper of record, the New York *Times*. Moskowitz says that the bankruptcy proceedings against Experimenter (which published AMAZING) resulted in the creditors getting paid more money than the company owed them originally, and claims that the *Times* referred to this unusual circumstance as "bankruptcy deluxe." He says there was an odd quirk in the bankruptcy law in 1929 that allowed three creditors to force Experimenter into bankruptcy even though it was solvent. He says that behind it all was a conspiracy to let another publisher get hold of the Experimenter magazines.

I had enough background in law and journalism to be intrigued by the story. The *Times* is one of the few papers to publish a thorough index, and copies of old editions are widely available on microfilm. So one cold evening in December 1976, finding myself near the Chicago Public Library, I went in and found the news stories that the *Times* had printed about the bankruptcy in 1929.

I had not expected to discover that the story was false. After all, it had been told and retold in SF circles for the better part of two decades. As far as I can determine, Dave Kyle was correct . . when he told me at MidAmeriCon that no one had ever challenged it. Critics like James Blish and Damon Knight have disputed Moskowitz over matters such as what author was first to use a given concept in SF, and many others have argued less weighty matters with him during his long career in science fiction and SF fandom. But even his enemies have accepted this Moskowitz version of the Experimenter bankruptcy without qualms.

I'm not sure whether this is a comment on the "ghetto" in which it has become popular to regard SF as existing, or whether it has something to do with the very audacity of the false story. Who would fake a quotation from the *Times*? There must be hundreds of libraries across the country in which anyone interested enough can disprove the story in less than an hour!

You see, the "bankruptcy deluxe" quotation that Moskowitz attributes to the *Times* simply doesn't exist.

The only thing close to it occurs in the *Times* for March 29, 1929, on page 13, in which a lawyer for the Irving Trust Company (which acted as receiver and trustee in the bankruptcy) said that if the creditors should be paid in full that would constitute "bankruptcy reform deluxe." The lawyer was not praising the Experimenter Publishing Company, which had already been judged a bankrupt. He was praising his client, Irving Trust, for its new approach to handling bankruptcy cases, and the Federal District Court, which had appointed Irving Trust its official receiver earlier that year, after a series of bankruptcy scandals had been exposed.

And the creditors were not paid in full. Moskowitz claims they got $1.08 for each dollar Experimenter owed them. They did not. They didn't even get a dollar for each dollar owed them. The final deal, reported in the *Times* for April 3, 1929, was estimated to repay them about 95 cents per dollar.

Ninety-five cents on the dollar (as businessmen commonly call such a 95 percent recovery of a debt) was certainly a good return from a bankrupt company. But it's thirteen cents *less* than the $1.08 Moskowitz claims Experimenter paid. Multiply that by the hundreds of thousands of dollars involved and you'll see quite a discrepancy—especially when you remember that these were 1929 dollars, backed by gold. One 1929 dollar would buy four copies of AMAZING STORIES.

Later that December, after returning to England, where I was living then, I summarized my findings in a brief article that Ted White ran as a guest editorial in AMAZING for July 1977.

I still wasn't satisfied that I knew the whole story, but I couldn't find out much more from England. And I might never know more, I realized glumly. The trail was as cold as the spring in Southampton.

Or perhaps even colder, as I realized when an officer of the Irving Trust Company responded to a letter of inquiry by saying that most of his company's records on the case had been routinely destroyed in 1939, the year before I was born. The only information he could offer me was that the creditors had received about 85 percent of their debts.

Another puzzle! The *Times* had reported a return estimated at 95 percent. What could have happened to lower the return to 85 percent?

In June 1977, work took me to the vicinity of New York City, and I found another chance to dig up more facts. The 1929 files of the Federal Court for the Southern District of New York are stored at the Military Ocean Terminal in Bayonne, New Jersey. The June day I drove to Bayonne was as hot as that winter night in Chicago had been cold. After securing the necessary permits and finding my way to the right building on the military base, I waited at a bare table while two dusty cardboard boxes were produced from somewhere in the bowels of the storehouse. When they came I opened the boxes gingerly and started to sort out the documents—stiff, brittle papers that probably no one had looked at in my lifetime. Most of them were older than the oldest science fiction fanzines.

It was exhilarating. I felt like the first man to enter the tomb of King Tut. I had already heard hints that there was a curse on this knowledge of the ancients—friends at AMAZING had passed the word that Moskowitz had reacted to my initial article with a letter that vented fury at my "temerity" in having dared to check his story, a letter that you can read in the October AMAZING—but nothing could have deterred me from searching through these old papers for their forbidden knowledge of good and evil.

When I left Bayonne that afternoon, I had answered most of the questions I had come with. Unfortunately, most of the answers had in turn generated further questions.

You'll be relieved to know that this process didn't go on forever. After moving back to America in the summer of 1977 I was able to pursue the story in a university library near my

home. I got a copy of the bankruptcy law as it stood in 1929 and found the offshoot of the Experimenter case that had gone to the Supreme Court. Along with my copies of the Federal District Court records and the newspaper stories, I had more than enough material to refute the Moskowitz story.

I wasn't satisfied, though. I wanted to know what really had happened. That meant talking to someone who had been involved in the case. I started going through telephone books, reference volumes, directories in search of the names that appeared in the newspaper stories and court documents. I had hopes that at least one of them had been young enough at the time to survive the intervening half century—young enough and lucky enough. I had picked one man as the most likely to fit this description, but every time I failed to find him in such a volume I would routinely check for the others, too.

And I found Robert Halpern.

He was not the man I had expected to find. Halpern was one of the three creditors who had filed the petition for involuntary bankruptcy against Experimenter Publishing Company on February 20, 1929. Skeptical as I had tried to be about the Moskowitz version after discovering the many holes in it, I had accepted one facet of Moskowitz's description of these three without really thinking about it, and formed a mental picture of the creditors—a mental picture that precluded the likelihood of any of the three surviving until 1977. My preconception kept me from recognizing a vital clue, and when I discovered the name of Robert Halpern in what I considered to be an unlikely place, I almost dismissed it as a coincidence of names.

I was getting desperate, though—I had almost exhausted the places to search for names—and so I risked the price of a phone call.

The bet paid off. It was the same Robert Halpern, and he remembered the case well. He had good reason to—it was his first big case, and left him an expert in the field of bankruptcy, a branch of the law that became increasingly important in America after 1929.

Halpern answered most of my questions easily, despite the intervening 48 years. In fact, the only problem I encountered was explaining to him why anyone would want to know about the Experimenter bankruptcy after nearly half a century.

After that phone call and an exchange of letters, I knew as much as I probably ever will about what happened back in 1929, when AMAZING's first publisher went into bankruptcy.

Earlier I likened the Moskowitz version to a mirror of the truth, in which everything appears reversed. This holds except for one statement of Moskowitz's that I feel fairly certain is true. In an odd sense, however, the symmetry of my simile is maintained—for it is on that one point that Moskowitz is contradicted by Hugo Gernsback himself.

To show this looking-glass relationship, let me key the true story off the Moskowitz myth as it appears in *Explorers of the Infinite*.

Moskowitz starts by comparing Gernsback magazines with those of Bernarr Macfadden, the publisher who invented the first "true confessions" magazines. He says Macfadden saw the Gernsback magazine as a "threat," and to back up these statements writes (on page 238 of his Hyperion edition):

While Macfadden's True Story

magazine rocketed to two million circulation under the editorship of F. Orlin Tremaine, who a few years later was to head Astounding Stories, *the weekly* Liberty, *which was bucking the well-established* Saturday Evening Post *and* Collier's, *though it sold a lot of copies, wasn't getting much advertising.*

Whether *Liberty* was selling many ads or not, Macfadden had little reason to care. Macfadden Publications did not acquire *Liberty* until 1931. (See Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, pages 74 and 243).

Moskowitz's account continues:

Macfadden (who lived in the same apartment house as Gernsback, at 527 Riverside Drive) now offered to buy Gernsback out, lock, stock, and barrel. Gernsback, heading what had grown to a million-dollar corporation, refused to consider the offer. The Experimenter Publishing Company and all its subsidiaries was a going and profitable concern, he asserted, and so diversified it most likely was to stay that way.

Did Macfadden offer to buy Gernsback out? Maybe. I don't know. I can't find anything to confirm the statement, but it's hard to prove a negative.

But I *do* know that Experimenter was not a healthy company in 1929—and I know that Gernsback knew it, too.

Back to Moskowitz:

On February 20, 1929, Gernsback was awakened early in the morning by the telephone. It was a reporter from The New York Times. *He wanted to know what was to become of radio station* WRNY *now that bankruptcy proceedings had been filed against the Experimenter Publishing Company. Gernsback was incredulous but the reporter insisted the story was true.*

The *Times* must have contacted Gernsback on February 20—the day the bankruptcy petition was filed—for it carried a quotation from him in its news story in the next morning's editions. So did the New York *Herald-Tribune*. Each paper said that Gernsback assured them that Experimenter would be reorganized in the next few days and continue operations, and that he said this with the authority of the receiver. The *Herald-Tribune* also quoted Gernsback as calling the bankruptcy petition a "temporary embarrassment."

But courts of law do not open for business "early in the morning"—and the bankruptcy petition said that each of the three debts represented a judgment entered in City Court on the same day.

So City Court had to enter three judgments—based on three separate lawsuits—and Federal District Court had to receive a petition based on them before reporters could phone Gernsback about the bankruptcy. If you've ever done any business with a court, you'll know how unlikely it is that all of these things could take place in time for a reporter to awaken Gernsback with a phone call "early in the morning."

In point of fact the petition bears the court clerk's stamp declaring it was filed at five minutes after twelve noon.

Moskowitz continues:

According to the law of 1929, if three or more creditors pressed the matter, a company or an individual could be forced into bankruptcy, regardless of solvency, merely because payments had been late.

False. Completely false.

The bankruptcy law in force in 1929

was the National Bankruptcy Act of 1898, as amended. Under that law, solvency was a complete defense against an allegation of bankruptcy. A solvent person or corporation that was charged with bankruptcy could have the case dismissed simply by proving that assets exceeded liabilities—and could also recover not only all its costs from those who had filed against it, but also any damages caused by the false charge.

So filing bankruptcy against a company was not something a creditor did lightly.

The definition of solvency under that law was spelled out precisely in Chapter I, Section 1: "a person shall be deemed insolvent within the provisions of this Act whenever the aggregate of his property, exclusive of any property which he may have conveyed, transferred, concealed, or removed, or permitted to be concealed or removed, with intent to defraud, hinder or delay his creditors, shall not, at a fair valuation, be sufficient in amount to pay his debts."

This means that a corporation (which is legally a "person") would not be insolvent for the purposes of bankruptcy even if it couldn't pay its debts as they came due—providing that its total assets exceeded its total liabilities.

A company in such a situation is described by a special legal term—it is called "temporarily embarrassed." When Gernsback used the words "temporary embarrassment" to describe the bankruptcy petition to the *Herald-Tribune*, he probably did so on legal advice and meant that Experimenter couldn't pay its debts as they matured.

If, as Moskowitz alleges, there was nothing wrong with Experimenter, then why would Gernsback have told two newspapers that the company would be reorganized? It was his chance to defend his company's reputation—to predict for publication that the case would be dismissed—if he actually thought the company was healthy.

He did not do so. And that in itself says a lot.

More Moskowitz:

Gernsback now went to the authorities. He showed them the papers from Macfadden offering to buy him out. He claimed that all three of the creditors were also Macfadden suppliers.

What authorities? The term is vague, but in a case before the Federal District Court, the only relevant authorities would be the court and its officers. There is no record in the files of the court on the Experimenter bankruptcy that Hugo Gernsback ever made such a protest.

If there were ever any papers from Macfadden offering to buy Gernsback out, they seem to have been lost. They are not part of the court's records, nor do they appear in the collection of Gernsback papers at Syracuse University.

But such papers would still prove little, for the next statement is also false. The three creditors were *not* Macfadden suppliers. They were not suppliers at all. Two of them were lawyers; the third was a legal secretary.

Quoting Moskowitz further:

The authorities, after considering the evidence, said that there was nothing they could do for Gernsback, but any attempt by Macfadden to obtain Experimenter titles would strengthen the conspiracy charges and provide grounds for an investigation. Macfadden never did bid for the titles, . . .

Macfadden *did* bid for the titles, and any authorities who read the New York *Times* would have known about it, because Macfadden's was one of two bids mentioned in the headline over a news story on March 29, 1929. Whoever concocted this myth should have known it, too, because this is the same news story from which the "bankruptcy reform deluxe" quotation was twisted out of context to reappear in the Moskowitz myth in this form:

. . . *and the creditors, in what* The New York Times *referred to as 'bankruptcy deluxe,' received $1.08 for each $1.00 due them, certainly an amazing performance for a 'bankrupt' company.*

As mentioned earlier, the *Times* never referred to the case as "bankruptcy deluxe" and the creditors did not receive $1.08 for each dollar due them. The Irving Trust Company figure of 85 percent is supported by the court records.

That was still a good recovery for a bankrupt company in those days, to be sure, but it was a result of the way the case was handled. Experimenter was definitely insolvent. Shortly I'll explain how I know that even Hugo Gernsback himself thought so.

Moskowitz finishes:

The bankruptcy law which had brought Gernsback to grief was changed, but a week too late to do him any good.

The National Bankruptcy Act of 1898 was not amended in any way in 1929. Nor in 1930. Nor in 1931. It was not amended at all between 1926 and 1932.

How do I know? The original 1898 law and each amendment to it have been compiled into a book called *Bankruptcy Laws of the United States.* It is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402, for a couple of dollars. If you live near a library that stocks government documents, it probably has a recent copy.

From this book, you can see that the Moskowitz statement about the peculiar law of 1929 that allowed a solvent company to be declared bankrupt is simply not true. The definition of solvency quoted previously and the provision that proof of solvency constitutes a complete defense against a charge of bankruptcy (Chapter III, Section 3C) were written into the original law and have never been changed. Look it up.

Now that the Moskowitz myth stands refuted, point by point, let me get on to what really did happen. I mentioned before that there was one Moskowitz statement I regard as true, and I'll mention that further along.

Certain questions had been nagging at me ever since I first read the *Times* reports of the bankruptcy. Who were the three creditors who filed the petition—Marie Bachmann, Robert Halpern, and Daniel A. Walters? Why did Experimenter owe each of them almost the same amount—$2,094.20, $2,095.24, and $2,030.65, respectively?

Where did these creditors get the estimates of $182,000 in assets and $600,000 in liabilities that they had cited in the petition? What made them so sure of these figures that they would risk paying the costs and damages for which they would be liable if wrong?

And why didn't Experimenter pay off these relatively small debts and thus avoid bankruptcy? Since each debt represented a judgment entered in City Court, each creditor must have filed a lawsuit and won it. A

lawsuit requires that the defendant be served with a summons, so Experimenter's officers must have known that these three creditors wanted their money.

Then I found the name Robert Halpern in the Martindale-Hubbard legal directory. The entry indicated he was admitted to the bar in 1929 after graduating from New York University.

Moskowitz's description of the three creditors as "suppliers" made me suspect a coincidence of names. I had formed a picture of Bachmann, Halpern and Walters as proprietors of small businesses, such as office-supply stores, to whom two thousand dollars would represent a sizable debt. I also pictured them as being middle-aged in 1929, which practically precluded their survival in 1977.

And if Halpern was a lawyer, how could Experimenter have failed to pay a debt to him? In general, lawyers have little trouble collecting their fees, simply because it is so easy for them to file suit.

Communication with Halpern clarified the whole picture.

In 1929, Halpern and Walters had been young lawyers working in the office of S. John Block, whose clients included Art Color Printing Company, which printed Experimenter magazines, and Bulkly, Dunton & Company, which supplied the paper. Marie Bachmann was the law firm's secretary.

Experimenter was heavily into debt to both the printer and paper supplier. An Art Color Printing Company officer, Ernest O. Macklin, had been placed into Experimenter to help manage its finances and get the debts paid off.

(Macklin was the man whose name I had been searching for in all those directories and biographical volumes. The bankruptcy petition had hinted at the presence of a creditor's representative within Experimenter, and I found the hint confirmed in a transcript of Sidney Gernsback's testimony before the bankruptcy referee. But I had arbitrarily formed a mental image of Macklin as a young, hotshot accountant or lawyer—not an officer of a large company.)

Macklin's presence was not received graciously by the Gernsback brothers, as this quotation from Sidney's testimony on April 17, 1929, illustrates:

Q *Why, if there was some $3,000 in the Consrad Company's bank account, did you pay Frowein out of the Experimenter Publishing Company's bank account?*

A *Because at that time, I will repeat again, there was an order passed by the two main creditors who put Mr. Macklin in as the chief muck-a-muck that all the accounts should be paid by the Experimenter Publishing Company. . . . the creditors themselves overruled us on that, they did whatever they wanted and we did everything they asked us to. Mr. Macklin was put in against our wishes.*

Sidney Gernsback served as treasurer of Experimenter (Hugo was president), and his resentment of Macklin's intrusion is evident from his testimony. (Consrad, by the way, was a subsidiary company of Experimenter, which went bankrupt simultaneously; the two cases were handled jointly.)

From the bankruptcy petition, this testimony of Sidney Gernsback, and remarks by Macklin at the final meeting of creditors years later, we can reasonably infer that Macklin's presence at Experimenter dated back well into 1928, if not further.

Early in 1929, for some reason, Art Color Printing found the arrangement unsatisfactory and decided to file involuntary bankruptcy against Experimenter.

(We will probably never know for certain why. But allow me this parenthetical speculation. I suspect the break came over Experimenter's radio stations. According to court records, the shortwave station, W2XAL, made no money, and WRNY lost $41,733.73 in 1927 and $39,409.05 in 1928. The 1928 losses would have been determined in the first months of 1929, and could have formed the basis for a demand by the creditors—who had no interest in radio—that the stations be sold. Hugo Gernsback was proud of his activities in radio and his experiments with television, which brought him much publicity; the call letters of WRNY appeared on the covers of his magazines and he advertised his own radio talks inside. Despite obsolete equipment and a limited franchise, the radio stations were sold in the bankruptcy for a hundred thousand dollars. If Gernsback had sold them at that price and put the money back into Experimenter, he might have been able to save the company from bankruptcy. But I repeat, this entire paragraph is only speculation on my part. Now back to verifiable facts.)

So it was decided to file bankruptcy. But the Block law office represented only two creditors. Each had debts of more than a hundred thousand dollars—but the law required that when the total number of creditors exceeded twelve, three had to combine to file involuntary bankruptcy. Experimenter had more than twelve creditors.

Let me quote Robert Halpern on what happened next:

Art Color held many past-due notes of Experimenter Publishing Company. Art Color assigned one of these notes to me, one to Dan Walters, and one to Marie Bachmann. The three of us instituted separate suits in the City Court against Experimenter. Judgment was entered by default. I think the only reason why the Gernsbacks did not forestall the petition by paying the judgments was they did not have the money. They would have needed six or seven thousand dollars. I credit Mr. Gernsback with enough intelligence to foresee that if he had paid the three notes on which we sued, Art Color would have then assigned three other notes with a hope of collecting another six or seven thousand dollars on account of its indebtedness. Art Color could have kept up this procedure for a long time. It held a lot of past-due notes.

This assignment of notes may sound tricky to a layman, but it's quite common in the business world, where it is known as "discounting paper." If you buy on credit, the store may sell your obligation to a bank to get money for its own bills.

So now there were the required three creditors to file against Experimenter, and the presence of Macklin in the Experimenter offices provided the insight into the company's financial state needed to make a reasonable estimate of its assets and liabilities.

Hugo Gernsback's statements to the press on February 20 sound as if he did not yet appreciate what had happened. Probably he did not recognize the names on the petition and assumed they were small creditors with whom his two large creditors—the printer and the paper supplier—would help him work out a deal.

But the reorganization was not to include the Gernsbacks. Halpern writes:

We saw no hope of collecting the indebtedness, which was long overdue, while Mr. Gernsback was in control. . . . I do not think we advised Mr. Gernsback in advance that we were going to file the bankruptcy petition.

Experimenter was judged bankrupt on March 6, 1929—*by default*. The corporation did not file the papers (called "schedules") giving its assets and liabilities, although it had ten business days to do so.

This silence speaks eloquently for the Gernsbacks' opinion of their company. As I've mentioned, proof of solvency would have been an absolute defense against the petition, causing it to be dismissed. The bankruptcy law provides the alleged bankrupt with the right to have a jury trial on this issue of solvency. If legal shenanigans resulted in an unjust decision, there was also the right to appeal to a higher court.

If Experimenter had actually been a million-dollar corporation with assets exceeding its liabilities, no competent businessman would have let it be declared bankrupt without even trying to defend it.

But this is what the Gernsbacks did.

Hugo and Sidney Gernsback turned immediately to setting up a new company, Gernsback Publications, to publish new magazines, which appeared on the newsstands by summer. One was *Science Wonder Stories*, for which the term "science fiction" was invented to replace the ugly portmanteau word "scientification" that Hugo Gernsback had used in AMAZING. (This magazine later became *Wonder Stories* and still later—when Gernsback sold it—*Thrilling Wonder Stories*, whose correspondence and fanzine-review columns helped lure me into SF fandom before the magazine finally folded in 1955.)

This explains why the newspapers did not publish figures for Experimenter's assets and liabilities other than the rough estimates given in the petition. With the company abandoned by its officers and stockholders, Irving Trust Company had to engage experts in the magazine and radio fields to determine the value of the assets.

Even so, the decision to continue operations was made almost immediately. Fast action was required. Experimenter employees had not been paid for two weeks, and would not continue to work unless they got the money due them. Irving Trust paid them even before the analysis of the company's financial situation could be completed, according to court records, and as a result the radio stations continued to broadcast and the magazines to appear.

Telegrams went out to advertisers and distributors soliciting their cooperation. Without that the strategy could never have succeeded, and any hesitation—even a brief suspension of operations—would probably have proved fatal to the plan to keep the company running. Other business executives could read about the bankruptcy in the press, and undoubtedly would have refused to work with the bankrupt company without the solid assurance of the Irving Trust Company that it was backing the plan.

It is hard to appreciate an innovation after it becomes commonplace. Today we are used to seeing companies continue operations after going into receivership. But the provisions of the Bankruptcy Act that make this easy today did not exist in 1929. They were embodied in the law in 1932 and 1938—during the depression,

when it was vital to preserve any business that had a chance of surviving—and the amendments were modelled on the experience gained from the Experimenter bankruptcy and others that followed.

The usual method of handling a corporate bankruptcy in 1929 was to halt operations, discharge the employees, sell off the assets for whatever they would bring, and split up the proceeds among the creditors—in other words, to liquidate the company.

(The only other alternative was to reach a "composition" with the creditors—that is, a settlement for partial payment. This is probably what Gernsback expected when he made his February 20 statements to the press.)

Irving Trust estimated in papers filed with the court that if this standard method had been used, the rate of recovery would have been only 25 percent or less. As Moskowitz observes correctly in his letter in the October AMAZING, a magazine publisher may have little in the way of physical assets. The value of magazines lies chiefly in such intangibles as reader loyalty and advertisers' faith in that loyalty.

Shutting down operations would have destroyed such intangibles, and left only physical assets, trademarks, copyrights, subscription lists, and of course the accounts receivable. (Moskowitz seems certain, in his letter, that the accounts receivable must have been overlooked in evaluating Experimenter's assets. It would have been most unusual if the bank that acted as receiver and trustee had done so, and I am happy to be able to assure you that the court records indicate no such alarming lapse of competence.)

So the Irving Trust Company put up more than fifty thousand dollars to keep the business in operation until it could be sold. It started paying out money before the creditors committee could be formed to approve such action. Court records say it did so on the assurance of "the larger creditors, representing a majority in amount of the claims against Experimenter Publishing Co., Inc." This assurance was received in a meeting held February 23, 1929. It seems likely that the creditors involved were the printer and the paper supplier—Art Color Printing and Bulkly, Dunton & Company.

In the same paper, filed by Irving Trust, occurs this tactful paragraph:

It was evident to the Receiver that in order to proceed energetically with the work necessary to the regular appearance of the various publications and to procure satisfactory advertising representation and revenue, it would be necessary to improve the executive personnel. This opinion was confirmed by those creditors whose advice and assistance the Receiver had.

In other words, the Gernsbacks had to go!

Go they did, to be replaced by an editor named Arthur Lynch, with past experience on radio magazines, and Bergan A. MacKinnon, a publisher, who served as business manager. MacKinnon later became the successful bidder for the Experimenter magazines. He made several offers, starting with one for $157,500, which were rejected. The creditors wanted to get as much money back as they could, and since they had kept the company running with the help of the receiver and trustee, they could not be forced into an early sale at a sacrifice price.

MacKinnon finally offered to pay an

amount equal to the total of all the approved claims, plus twenty thousand dollars towards the administration expenses. These expenses—the various fees for lawyers, accountants, and other professionals, and the fees and commissions due the receiver and trustee—were greater than twenty thousand, and the rest had to come from the creditors. The deal was expected to net the creditors 95 percent of their debts, and this figure received headlines in the *Times* on April 4, 1929.

It was a marvelous recovery rate for the time. Everyone involved seemed happy with the outcome.

Except of course for the Gernsbacks. The corporation they had abandoned as worthless had turned out—with a change of management and the injection of some fresh capital—to have been worth a lot after all. They must have seen the result as reflecting badly on their own management, as well as upon their judgment in abandoning it.

As a result they seem to have convinced themselves that Experimenter had not "really" been bankrupt at all. Sidney Gernsback expressed this view in testimony before the referee, explaining that if Experimenter had been insolvent, it could not have been sold for enough to pay off most of the creditors' claims against it. He does not seem to recognize that the company against which bankruptcy was filed on February 20 differed significantly from the reorganized and recapitalized company that was sold six weeks later, on April 3.

It was in Sidney Gernsback's testimony also that the first hint of the "conspiracy" charge emerged—only to be quickly silenced. On April 17, 1929, Sidney was answering questions about the subscription lists of the Experimenter magazines when he digressed for a moment:

Q *Do you know what copies were made of those?*

A *Yes, some years back a set of copies was made and I took them home in case of fire and sometimes for comparing and when the clients of Mr. Block forced us to make a deal with Mr. Macfadden to sell out to them—.*

MR. BLOCK: *Never mind that.*

Sidney dropped the subject, and it didn't come up again until 1959, when Moskowitz published the version he says he got from Hugo Gernsback. There is no evidence in the court records, in the newspapers of the time, or anywhere else that I can find, of any other hint of conspiracy being put forth.

Block's pre-emptory manner in cutting off Sidney Gernsback suggests that he had heard the complaint before and knew what Sidney was about to say. The fact that Sidney did drop the matter, and apparently never brought it up again in public, suggests that Block had warned him that he might be sued if he did.

I asked Robert Halpern if he knew anything about the conspiracy charge, and received this reply:

Your letter and the material that you supplied to me with your letter is the first intimation that Mr. Gernsback claimed a conspiracy. I am quite sure that if such a claim had been made during the course of the bankruptcy proceedings, I would have some recollection of it. Not having any such recollection, I can state quite dogmatically that no such claim was then made. So far as I know, Mr. MacKinnon was not associated with Mr. Macfadden in any way. My only explanation, for what it is worth, is that the charge of conspiracy is now being made on the assumption that all

the people connected with the 1929 bankruptcy are now dead. For the most part, this is true. I think I am the only survivor who has a full recollection of the case.

Halpern's explanation is borne out by the fact that Bernarr Macfadden—the only person mentioned by name in the Moskowitz conspiracy charge—died in 1955. Moskowitz first published the charge in 1959, four years after Macfadden's death and thirty years after the bankruptcy.

Halpern, though fresh out of law school, played a significant role in the Experimenter bankruptcy. S. John Block sailed off for a European vacation that summer, leaving Halpern in charge of the case, and Halpern did a very important thing: he put up a tax bar—or, decoded from legalese, he set a deadline after which tax claims against the bankrupt company could not be filed.

Tax claims receive priority over other debts, and so any valid claims for unpaid taxes would have to be paid in full and the ordinary creditors, such as Block's clients and the many others with smaller claims, would have had to split up what was left.

The federal government filed a claim for $31,858.21 in unpaid taxes, plus penalties bringing the claim to almost forty thousand dollars. The claim was made before the deadline.

New York State also made a claim for forty thousand dollars in unpaid franchise taxes—but the state's claim was filed after the deadline.

The receiver refused to allow the late claim and New York State sued Irving Trust Company, claiming its sovereign status was being infringed. The case climbed all the way to the Supreme Court, where it was argued and finally decided in 1933. Block and Halpern defended Irving Trust, which won the case every step of the way. (See *U.S. Supreme Court Reports*, 288 U.S. 329, 53 S.Ct. 389.)

Block also negotiated the federal claim with the U.S. government, succeeding in settling the claim of forty thousand dollars for around twelve thousand.

So only a small part of the tax claims had to be paid. But the negotiations and the lawsuit that went to the Supreme Court dragged out the bankruptcy of Experimenter far longer than had originally been foreseen. With each added year came administration costs—and the court costs and legal fees ate into the money that had originally been intended to pay the creditors' debts.

As a result, the purchase price that in 1929 had been expected to repay the creditors 95 percent was inadequate to do so. At the final meeting of the creditors committee, on December 20, 1935, the creditors objected strenuously when they learned that in the end they would get only about 85 percent.

Macklin of Art Color Printing was one who objected, saying he had a claim of $175,000 and adding: "I wish to go on record as saying that the large creditors had a great deal to do in the preliminary work whereby this final settlement was made. There was a great deal of work done by the creditors before any of the lawyers entered into the situation."

(Thus Macklin confirmed again what the bankruptcy petition had implied and Sidney Gernsback had said in his testimony—that the large creditors had put Macklin into Experimenter long before the bankruptcy petition in hopes of getting their bills paid. Clearly Experimenter was not a healthy company or there would have been no need to do so.)

The creditors withdrew their objections after being told that if the tax claims had been paid in full, their rate of recovery would have fallen to around 60 percent.

In the end, according to the court records, the general creditors were paid $375.319.16 against claims totalling $441,760.36, or almost exactly 85 percent. This calculation excludes tax claims of $13,282.86. Thus the tax and general claims total $455,043.22, and this figure should be regarded as the total liabilities of Experimenter Publishing Company. There were some other claims that, like the franchise-tax claim of New York State, were filed too late, but these were rejected out of hand and never examined for validity.

It's interesting that Hugo and Sidney Gernsback did not disdain to file their own claims against Experimenter. Hugo claimed $6,137.28 and Sidney $8,972 in unpaid salaries for the weeks immediately prior to the bankruptcy. It will be seen that they were paying themselves in excess of a thousand dollars per week. These claims were the subject of objections by other creditors, for reasons that can be easily imagined.

By contrast, Hugo Gernsback as editor of AMAZING had paid H.P. Lovecraft only $25 (about one-fifth of a cent per word) for his classic story "The Colour Out of Space"—which made Lovecraft ignore AMAZING as a market thereafter, and call Gernsback "Hugo the rat." (See L. Sprague de Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography*, page 282.) Even Edgar Rice Burroughs had trouble getting paid for the stories he let AMAZING publish. (See Irwin Porges, *Edgar Rice Burroughs: The Man Who Created Tarzan*, pages 638 and 1182.)

It was a reaction to the Gernsbacks' large salaries that made the creditors committee require MacKinnon—in drawing up the charter for his temporary company that would publish the Experimenter magazines until he had paid off the notes that he used in buying them—to write in a clause saying no employee would be paid more than ten thousand dollars a year. That was still a lot of money in 1929.

Speaking of 1929, it's time to get to the statement of Moskowitz's that I believe to be true. It occurs twice in *Explorers of the Infinite*—first on page 240:

Gernsback was far from licked. He sent out a series of circulars. To readers of Science and Invention *he announced that he would publish* Everyday Mechanics; *subscribers of* Radio News *could get* Radio-Craft *and* AMAZING STORIES *fans found that they could look forward to* Science Wonder Stories.."

—and again on page 322, in an article claiming that Hugo Gernsback invented the term "science fiction":

The distinction of first using it, however, also goes to Gernsback, who wrote a form letter over his signature in 1929, which was mailed to former subscribers of AMAZING STORIES *and* Science and Invention, *announcing the new magazine and offering fifty dollars for the best letter on the subject: 'What Science Fiction Means to Me.'"*

So in two separate places in his book, Moskowitz says that Gernsback used the subscription lists from Experimenter magazines like AMAZING to send out circulars advertising for subscribers to the new magazines.

What seems to have escaped Moskowitz and the other science-fiction historians who have drawn on his account is that these subscription lists were the property of the bankrupt

corporation. For Gernsback to use them for his new company would have been illegal under Section 29 of the Bankruptcy Act.

But it did not escape the lawyers for the receiver and the creditors. They put Gernsback on the stand in a referee's hearing on April 17, 1929—the same hearing in which Sidney Gernsback mentioned Ernest Macklin's role as "chief muck-a-muck"—and questioned him at lenth about that form letter.

The testimony that Gernsback gave—under oath—contradicts Moskowitz directly. It began:

Q Is this a correct copy of the letter you sent out?

A Yes, sir.

The letter was entered into the record, and the questioning proceeded:

Q Was this sent to subscribers of AMAZING STORIES?

A Certainly not. We were most anxious not to do that, we were advised by counsel not to do that and we did not do it because being subscribers to one magazine they certainly would not subscribe to another.

Q Then what was the meaning of the paragraph in your letter that reads: "In short, my friend, you will have a new and better magazine of Scientifiction, one infinitely better than the old AMAZING STORIES"?

A That is right.

Q What was the meaning of "old AMAZING STORIES"?

A That means I had been the editor of the old AMAZING STORIES.

Q Old AMAZING STORIES *as distinguished from new* AMAZING STORIES *you were going to publish?*

A No.

Q What was the meaning of it?

A I referred to the magazine published since 1926. I was most anxious to point out I was not going to publish AMAZING STORIES *as you will notice there. The letter speaks for itself.*

Indeed it does. The letter says, "You will remember me as the Editor and Publisher of AMAZING STORIES Magazine and AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY . . . You know what I have done for you in the past and what sort of magazines I can publish. . . . In short, my friend, you will have a new and better magazine of Scientifiction, one infinitely better than the old AMAZING STORIES. . . . You realize that no publisher likes to go ahead with a new publication unless his old reader friends say to him, 'Old man, I'm with you heart and soul; let's go!' And that's just what I'm asking you to do now. . . . And of course, good old Artist Paul will illustrate the magazine with his usual excellent drawings, and I, to be sure will give you the monthly editorial, just as I always did."

Such quotations show clearly that the letter was intended to be read by AMAZING STORIES readers. Who else could Gernsback have sent it to? In the case of his new radio magazine Gernsback could plausibly contend that he got names for the circulars from a variety of sources, such as his Radio Specialty Company—but where could he have acquired a list of science fiction readers except from the only company then publishing science fiction magazines?

(Incidentally, the letter about the new SF magazine uses the old term "scientifiction" throughout; contrary to Moskowitz, the new term "science fiction" does not appear even once in it.)

The lawyers were skeptical, and kept hammering at Gernsback to tell them where he got the names. They bounced a lot of sarcasm off him, and reduced him at times to claiming he

didn't understand the questions, but never got him to admit that he had used either Experimenter subscription lists or names acquired from Experimenter advertisers who had keyed their ads to tell which magazines were generating a response.

The *Times* reported this hearing on April 18 under the delightfully ambiguous headline GERNSBACKS DENY DIVERTING ASSETS, but there were subsequent hearings it did not report. In these the Gernsbacks were asked about cardboard boxes they had removed from Experimenter offices just after the bankruptcy petition (the boxes contained old overcoats, they said), and Hugo Gernsback was questioned about a grand piano, radios, and a sunlamp that had been paid for by Experimenter but were in Gernsback's home. They couldn't faze him. His answer about the sunlamp is my favorite—he said he would be happy to bring it in and give it to the creditors.

The penalty for diverting assets was imprisonment for up to five years. There is no record that anyone considered charging Gernsback with such an offense, and Halpern says he cannot recall any such discussion. It is curious to reflect, though, that Moskowitz's flat assertions that Gernsback did use the Experimenter lists are harsher than any public statements made about him by opposing lawyers during the bankruptcy.

Another accusation against Gernsback by Moskowitz occurs in his letter in AMAZING for October 1977. On page 125, Moskowitz says that he had Dun & Bradstreet check on Experimenter Publishing Company and goes on:

The check showed that The Experimenter Publishing Co., Inc., was formed on March 10, 1926, with Hugo Gernsback as president. Between the time that it was formed and an involuntary petition of bankruptcy filed on February 20, 1929, it paid a total of 84% of the value of the stock in dividends . . . *If that isn't bankruptcy deluxe what do you call it? Certainly 84% in stockholder dividends in less than three years does not indicate an unprofitable company!"* (Emphasis Moskowitz's.)

If this is the explanation for Experimenter's inability to pay its bills, then there are many things we could call it. "Milking the creditors," for instance.

The final sentence quoted is indisputable. If the Gernsbacks did indeed form a corporation, pay themselves large salaries as officers and employees of it, neglect to pay due bills and taxes, withdraw the company's capital in the form of large dividends, and finally let it collapse into bankruptcy, then it's practically certain that they made a profit at it.

And perhaps "bankruptcy deluxe" is a good euphemism for business methods such as these. Unfortunately, both the formal language of the law and the earthy shorthand of the business world already possess an adequate variety of expressions describing such actions, and there seems little likelihood that Moskowitz's phrase will catch on.

But I'm afraid I cannot support Moskowitz in this accusation against the Gernsbacks. When I phoned Dun & Bradstreet to get a copy of the report, I was told politely that that company does not supply information on corporations half a century defunct. I suspect that what Moskowitz actually has is a report on the bankruptcy itself. The money paid to creditors of a bankrupt is called "div-

idends." just like the money paid to stockholders of a successful company, and the percentage he says went to stockholders, 84 percent, is almost equal to the 85 percent that the creditors got.

I started by saying that Halpern and the other lawyers, businessmen and bankers involved in the Experimenter bankruptcy probably saved science fiction from an early death.

To see what I mean, just switch your mind to alternate-universe mode and imagine what would have happened if the Experimenter bankruptcy had been handled by the normal methods of 1929. Suppose the magazines and radio stations had been shut down, the employees dismissed, and any salable assets sold off as quickly as possible for whatever they would bring?

First of all, AMAZING would never have reached its fiftieth anniversary. You wouldn't be holding this magazine in your hands today. Poof!

Second, the creditors might have received 25 cents on the dollar or less. Such a substantial loss might have embittered them against working further with the Gernsbacks. Others in the business world, warned by word of mouth and what they read in the papers, might also have been reluctant to extend credit to the new Gernsback organization, and the Gernsbacks might have experienced difficulty in launching their new line of magazines.

And if they did manage to get them off the ground, and used the Experimenter subscription lists in that alternate world as Sam Moskowitz says they did in this real one, they might have found their new corporation entangled in a lawsuit. With a low recovery rate, the Experimenter creditors might have been far tougher about finding out where Gernsback got those names.

So with AMAZING folded and the new SF magazine tied up in court or encountering difficulty getting credit or both, there would have been no SF magazines being published at all.

AMAZING was one of the healthiest of the Experimenter magazines, according to the financial analysis of the magazines that the Irving Trust Company initiated.

But in this alternate world, that analysis would never have been made, and AMAZING might have unjustly been blamed for the Experimenter bankruptcy. The bankruptcy might have given scientifiction a bad name (as if the name "scientifiction" weren't bad enough), and other magazine publishers would have shied away from starting such magazines.

In short, publishing a successful SF magazine might have been commonly considered impossible, just as electing a Catholic President was considered impossible for decades after the unsuccessful campaign of Al Smith in 1928.

Clayton Magazines would never have started *Astounding Stories of Super Science* in this alternate world. (In the real world it began with the January 1930 issue in late 1929.)

In this alternate world there were no proliferating pulp SF magazines in the nineteen thirties and forties—no Campbell *Astounding* with its stable of writers such as Heinlein, Asimov et al.—no *Galaxy*, no *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, no *Analog*..

In other words, the Gernsback ghetto so deplored by Brian Aldiss and others would not exist. Scientific romances like those of H.G. Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs might have continued to appear, and perhaps some of the mainstream books such as

Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *1984*, and Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* would have been published in substantially the same form (although *1984* was probably influenced by Orwell's reading American SF magazines). These books would be the closest thing to our hard-core SF in this alternate world.

And of course science-fiction fandom would not exist at all. It was only starting to form in the late nineteen twenties as a result of Gernsback's practice of publishing readers' full addresses with their letters in AMAZING. It's hard to imagine how people who enjoyed reading *Brave New World* could have contacted each other to share their enthusiasm.

How you feel about all this depends a lot on which school of thought you subscribe to. For my part, I tend to agree with Ted White's recent editorial here which maintained that SF emerged stronger and healthier for having spent a long period of introspection in its ghetto. The rich variety of concepts developed as a result are now being diluted to concoct suitable fare for less sophisticated audiences, such as the fans of movie and television SF. Without the ghetto, these concepts would never have had a place to germinate.

In any case, there's no denying that magazine science fiction came very close to dying out at the hands of the man who originated it, and was rescued by people like Robert Halpern and his colleagues in the Experimenter bankruptcy case. They deserve better from those of us who care about science fiction than this false charge of conspiracy.

For if Hugo Gernsback was the father of that bastard branch of literature we know as science fiction, then Experimenter's creditors fall into the role of the mother, with all that this implies—while Irving Trust Company and its attorneys become in this extended metaphor the foster parents who found a means of support for the abandoned child until it could be adopted.

—TOM PERRY

(cont. from page 96)

real thing is very important. It makes him very proud, to be able to come here, to see a way of life he's wiped from the earth . . ." The guard began to walk again, and the other fell into step beside him.

As they turned the corner out of sight, Eula Mae could still hear the guard's fine, resonant tones going on: "But, of course, even the Old Man will not last forever . . . when he finally goes then you can have all your replacements, and you'll only have to maintain your surrogate people."

Voice and footsteps faded out. Eula Mae got to her feet, slowly and painfully. Her head hurt too much to think, almost too much to move. She could only wish she'd never awoken, never noticed that there was something wrong with the moon . . . It took her minutes to gain the strength and the will to take a few steps forward, and she was so engrossed in this simple action that she did not hear the returning footsteps until it was much too late.

She heard one voice say quietly, "Ah, there it is."

And then the pain in her head blazed up, she went blank, and she crumpled in a heap in the center of the big arcade.

—LISA TUTTLE

(cont. from page 4)
I place second), a record which may never be broken. According to *Locus*, AMAZING's circulation had fallen to 27,000 under the previous editor and publisher. When Ziff-Davis took over the magazine in 1938 Palmer was hired on a commission based on sales. He reputedly rejected an entire issue already set in type, rejected all but one of the around one hundred stories in inventory, changed the policy of the magazine to one of more juvenile action-adventure stf—and still got his first issue, dated June, 1938, out on time.

It was a bad period for stf magazines. While *Astounding*, with new editor John W. Campbell, Jr., was making a bid for greater maturity of stories and presentation, AMAZING was pushed firmly in the opposite direction . *Wonder Stories* (the third stf magazine of any real duration) also changed publishers (a year or so earlier) and became *Thrilling Wonder Stories* with a juvenile approach that equalled Palmer's AMAZING. (The differences were largely in the packaging: *Wonder*'s covers were as blatant as AMAZING's, but lacked the colorfulness that Palmer promoted.)

In the wartime years of the forties publishers could sell all the magazines they could print, held back only by the rationing of paper. AMAZING's claimed circulation jumped to 185,000 but the magazine was quarterly by the end of the war—there wasn't enough paper for more frequent publication.

After the war Palmer introduced Richard S. Shaver (who also died recently) and the paranoid stf of all time: a "mythos" in which Shaver claimed the world's ills were due to the mind-control activities of "Deros" who lived in caves beneath the Earth's surface and manipulated mankind for evil ends. Although presented as fiction, the Shaver Mystery was claimed to be based on "fact," and while the lunatic fringe of the stf world flocked to AMAZING's pages the stf community as a whole was disgusted and shunned both Palmer and AMAZING.

Palmer left AMAZING in late 1949 to start *Other Worlds*. In that magazine he continued to publish Shaver (sometimes pseudononymously in an effort to prove to his readership that Shaver was more "acceptable" when one was unaware of his hand in a story; but it was always an open question as to how much "Shaver" was written by Palmer), but he also took a strong stance for respectability as an editor (and now as a publisher, as well): *Other Worlds* was not edited for the juvenile audience at which Palmer had successfully aimed AMAZING. Alas, *Other Worlds*' sales were never healthy (and probably never exceeded 25,000), and by the mid-fifties the magazine was on its last legs. Palmer tried a variety of devices. He folded *Other Worlds* and launched several other titles (*Universe SF*, *Science Stories*, *Mystic*), returning after a half-dozen issues of each to *Other Worlds*, which in turn metamorphosed into *Flying Saucers from Other Worlds*. From the late fifties onward, Palmer all but vanished from the stf community, his publications aimed instead at the lunatic fringe he had cultivated so successfully with Shaver in the late forties, self-published, self-distributed, and generally obscure.

I corresponded with Palmer in the last days of *Other Worlds*. I sent him redesigned cover layouts, more than a dozen sample drawings of my own, and half a dozen Morris Scott Dollens paintings I'd purchased at the 1955 World SF Convention. He never used any of them, and never returned any of them, to my intense disappointment. A devoted fan, I had given them to him in hopes they would help him keep his struggling magazine going. At that point he stopped answering my letters. It was a disappointing end.

(cont. on page 131)

...OR SO YOU SAY

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to Or So You Say, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.*

Dear Ted,
The various insults that Sam Moskowitz hurls my way for my "temerity" in exposing his false version of the 1929 bankruptcy of AMAZING's first publisher, Experimenter Publishing Company suggest that his disbelief in historical research is a matter of firm principle. Not only does he refrain from doing it himself—he suffers moral outrage when someone else does.

But his letter in the October 1977 AMAZING makes no attempt to refute the main points of my article in the July issue—namely, that the New York *Times* never reported that the bankrupt company paid its creditors more than it had owed them in the first place, and that the *Times* never referred to the case as "bankruptcy deluxe."

For nearly two decades now, Moskowitz has relied on the authority and reliability of the *Times* to authenticate his mythical version. This has worked so well that no one seems to have bothered checking it, reasoning I suppose that no one would dare publish a false version that could be so easily checked.

Now suddenly he omits all mention of the *Times* and concentrates on the vital issue of which of several published versions of his myth I quoted from. I am, he says, "dishonest" and "incompetent" and "contemptible" for having quoted from the 1959 version rather than an almost identical one that appeared in 1963.

If so, then so must be David A. Kyle, in whose 1976 book *A Political History of Science Fiction* I found the 1959 material quoted.

I do wish I had known about the account in Moskowitz's 1963 book when I wrote my article. In this fuller account there are further errors that more than make up for the two trivial corrections it makes to the 1959 material, and I would have been happy to forget about Moskowitz's misspelling of Bernarr Macfadden's name and his misdating of the bankruptcy in the 1959 version if it meant I could have quoted from the longer, wronger version of 1963.

But I think I know why Moskowitz concentrated on such trivial matters and mentioned the New York *Times* only by implication in a parenthetical comment that newspapers can make mistakes. The *Times* stories not only do not support his mythical version—they put Moskowitz in the embarrassing position of contradicting not only America's most respected newspaper of record, but his own hero Hugo Gernsback, and finally—in this letter—Moskowitz himself!

In both his 1959 and 1963 versions, Moskowitz wrote: " . . . any attempt by Macfadden to obtain Experimenter titles would strengthen the conspiracy

charges and provide grounds for an investigation. Macfadden never did bid for the titles . . ."

As I mentioned in my article, the *Times* on March 29, 1929, headlined the fact that Macfadden *did* bid for the titles.

The retreat of Moskowitz can be seen in his letter in the October AMAZING, in which he changes his story so that it now reads: "There could be no investigation of MacFadden unless he had gotten the magazines . . ." But in the same paragraph, Moskowitz goes on to say that Macfadden *did* get the magazines! Still there was no investigation of the conspiracy charges.

This begins to sound like one of those paradoxes that churchmen explain were created by God to test your faith. And no wonder. For the issue is essentially the same one that has divided religion and science for ages, at least since Galileo faced the Inquisition: Are you going to accept authority and believe what you're told, or are you going to go out and check to find out the truth for yourself?

Anyone who lives near a good library can verify in an hour or less that the Moskowitz myth about the Experimenter bankruptcy is false. Finding out what really did happen is a little harder, but I am now working on another article based on further research into the matter. Some of the things I've found are amazing enough to qualify for appearance in this magazine, where I hope you'll see them soon.

THOMAS PERRY
Boca Raton, Florida 33432

The article to which Tom refers can be found in this issue, and does indeed qualify as 'amazing'.—TW

Dear Sir:

The guest editorial and Sam Moskowitz's subsequent letter (in the July and October issues respectively) were very interesting. Apparently Sam Moskowitz takes Thomas Perry's article as an insult. This shows that my original thought on reading the editorial (that what happened to the Experimenter Publishing Co. in 1929 was at last settled) was wrong.

The 'theme' that Sam Moskowitz brings up is an interesting point. But, as I understand it, the purpose of the article (which is what was implied in the paragraph concerning the 'theme') was merely to find out what happened to Gernsback, not to establish Perry as a great researcher. The 'theme' quoted in the same paragraph is not a 'theme' by definition, it is a conclusion.

Moskowitz is also mistaken on his point about quoting from the birthday brochure to 'prove' Moskowitz wrong. According to the article, Perry is not quoting from the 'birthday brochure' but from David A. Kyle's *A Pictorial History of Science Fiction*. Perry's quotation matches Kyle's excerpt from the birthday brochure. Nothing is said by either Perry or Kyle concerning taking this quote from *Explorers of the Infinite*. Perry mentions *The Immortal Storm* only, and quotes from it.

This raises another point: how did Bernar McFadden spell his name? Although a minor point, it makes these quotes suspect. His signature must be on file somewhere.

From what Moskowitz says in another part of his letter, if you take this information alone, it looks like the distributor and advertisers did not pay him, and he was short of cash when the creditors sued him for payment. This is a possibility which deserves looking into.

And ¼% of the value of the stock is also not the $1.08 on the dollar that Moskowitz formerly claimed was paid to the stockholders. That indicates a more normal form of bankruptcy.

And if there was to be no investigation of McFadden unless he got the magazines, what happened to the in-

vestigation? Moskowitz says that McFadden and McFadden Publications were the owners of the magazine. Something is wrong here. Moskowitz's statement conflicts with everything allegedly known about Gernsback's business failure, and much that Moskowitz has said.

I wonder what the previous Statement of Ownerships said about the owners? And, as I understand publishing, printing plants often print books and magazines by rival publishers (although I'm not sure of that). *And* if McFadden Publications and Bernarr McFadden owned the magazine, how did Teck Publishing Co. fit into this? McFadden may not have been sole owner of McFadden Publications.

At several points, ugly personal attacks on Perry are made, particularly in the last long paragraph. These can be discarded without affecting what Moskowitz really has to say, and should have been. Moskowitz's frequent use of italics could have been removed.

All this controversy over something that happened nearly fifty years ago! From what is mentioned, the controversy was settled—long ago in Bankruptcy Court. Legal records of the hearing may still exist. Perhaps if these were found, the entire thing would be settled.

ROBERT NOWALL
6 Martin Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

As you'll note, in Perry's article elsewhere this issue, those legal records do *exist. I did not delete either Moskowitz's italics or his invective for the simple reason that he wrote his letter for publication and deserved to have it published as written. The same courtesy is given anyone who feels he has been criticized here.*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

I would like to commend Thomas Perry on the job he did in the editorial section of the July issue of AMAZING. He did a fine job of exploding the myths surrounding Hugo Gernsback, and I liked the way he used factual, historical evidence from newspaper accounts to back him up.

However, I would like to point out one discrepency in his editorial. This concerns the issue on whether Mr. Gernsback used his old subscription lists in soliciting new subscribers. I am not arguing on whether he did or not. I sincerely hope that he was an honest man, and didn't use the lists, and to the best of my knowledge, he probably was honest. However, because he denied using the old lists, doesn't necessarily mean he didn't use them. If someone is accused of doing something wrong, he might not admit it.

A way to check if he used the lists or not, is to compare the lists from his old company, and the one he founded after his bankruptcy.

Sincerely,
ROBERT WILSEY
4459 Venicean Rd.
Sea Isle City, N.J. 08243

Dear Ted:

I have just finished the October issue of AMAZING. As I expected, you are receiving a lot of negative comment on Rich Brown's "Two of a Kind," which I consider the best short story I have read in many years.

It treats the gut feeling of many racist white Americans of yesterday, today and tomorrow. What the critics are upset about is not what happens to the woman, but its being described. This sort of abuse has been common for years, but, like racism itself, is, by gentleman's agreement, never discussed in public. American Science Fiction is the fantasy world of middle-class white America. Seven out of ten human beings on this Earth are invisible to them. This majority (not minority) appears only as tokens or not at all. And *Star Wars* is a prize example of this racism. Any Science

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For the record—I am 67 years old, a reader of Science Fiction since 1919, founder of the first fan club in America and, I am almost ashamed to say, white.

AUBREY MACDERMOTT
130 Magnolia Avenue
Larkspur, Calif. 94939

Dear Ted

John Shirley's "Shadow of a Snowstorm" deserves an entire letter for me to praise the damn thing. It is a rarity for me these days, a diamond among wool, a pleasing, well-crafted, professional *story*, with a fine writing, fascinating postulates, and even a really jolting denouement! I liked John Shirley's "Shadows of a Snowstorm."

I have always thought of good stories as puzzles, complex or simple, but puzzles nonetheless. In a puzzle, every part, every piece, contributes importantly to the whole composition. Metaphorically speaking, "Snowstorm" was a complete puzzle. There were no loose ends laying around. It was a whole, solid, firmly-constructed unit. The story puzzle is one composed of many pieces, those fitting into four main groups: plot, characterization, narrative, theme. On all counts "Snowstorm" succeeded. Moreover, a story can only achieve its full potential if it lives up to the author's expectations. The reader can sense dissatisfaction, just as (s)he can sense feelings of pride within the work. John Shirley's tale seemed to fulfill its author's objective; to communicate effectively with the reader.

Shirley extropolated on today's self-indulgent society beautifully, as well as envisioning an altogether probable direction for American workers. The intriguing idea of humanequins would indeed offer an alternative to many unemployed people if realized. Of course Shirley didn't, couldn't stop there, without exercising his Romantic muse. Thus humanequins become not just commodities but genuine works of art, progressing even further, toward religious status. How likely in a society where the status quo is total individuality, even if external conditions cannot permit it. Sex and erotica flowed through the pages like salient fluid. For awhile I thought Shirely was going to let his imagination, and gonads, run wild and sacrifice the story values in order to stimulate. But he didn't. Shirley continued to piece together his puzzle, keeping in mind that every part of the story must work for the story, not against or in spite of it.

Sandra was a real woman to me. Her fears, hurts, joys were mine. I know from experience that characterizing women is difficult; that is, if you're a man. But Shirley pulled it off splendidly. It would be silly to think that's because Shirley's gay. If he is, then wouldn't it seem more likely that he'd be even more ignorant of the female psyche, living in a male-dominated emotional microcosm as it were. One of my sturdy beliefs has always been that gays understand women because they are women, but that philosophy has grown dimmer over the years of enlightenment. Shirley's prose was elegant, though, approaching a gentle Ellisonian crawl, but remaining solid. By solid I mean like the old stuff Knight and Russell and Asimov used to do, before the New Wave. Shirley seems a part of the *New Wave*, so patented by fandom and some pros alike, because of the story's obvious sexual consciousness, but nothing is sacrificed in the way of story values. You said yourself, Ted, that after *Starship Troopers*, Heinlein began to substitute more of his own viewpoints into his work, and

thus destroying their qualities as stories, as legitimate fiction. Shirely did not fail me.

Most of the letters in response to Rich Brown's "Two of a Kind" *were* reactionary. If my memory serves me correctly, I condemned the story (in the letter you excerpted my passage from) as trite, boring, and generally uninteresting, and I followed through with explanations as to why I felt this way. I like writing reactionary letters, though they're fun to read. Duff's was a distinct pleasure, one of the best ever, and Tim McManus's was pretty good too.

McManus's letter was as crudely done as Mr. Duff's. Looking back on Steve's letter now, I feel it was for the most part a hideous, if literate debacle. McManus's letter was worse, because it compounded error upon error.

There is no such thing as a self-effacing killer-critic, which was what McManus was trying to be. His efforts put yogurt on his face and elicited quite a few chuckles from myself. If you must insult, don't be so apologetic about it. Damn it, man, just spit it out. When making an ass out of one's self, it's best not to settle for just one cheek. That way people can hate *and* respect you. But what does Tim say? "I think it is great that you allow readers to discuss their likes and dislikes and their reasons for such reactions, but three-and-a-half pages of garbage?" What was your letter, Tim? Give McManus a gold star and a Salerno butter cookie.

Only one thing, Ted, what about those people that *agreed* with Duff, either in full or in part?

Obviously the trend of developing our sexual freedom will continue in society. *Hustler* is already presenting masturbation in their pictorials (which might not be bad if tastefully done but Larry Flynt has all the aesthetics of a deranged truck driver). Gays are coming out of the closets in droves. If you worked on Rush Street like I did you'd know. I'm not predicting a world as bad as say Charles Beaumont's "There Was a Crooked Man", but I think homosexuality will become a social accepted norm by the end of the decade, possibly even status quo in some parts of the country. Frisco and Berkley most likely.

I never could understand or tolerate homosexuality and I guess I never will. To me it's a moral disease, but that's only my opinion. We can no longer fight, so we must just accept it for what it is, an immutable element of the human race. Frankly, I always thought it was quite pretentious. After all, could pederastic sexual activity be that far removed from normal heterosexual intercourse?

DENNY (TONY) DALEY
Chicago, Ill. 60651

Dear Mr. White,

I finally, (thank god) received the July issue in the mail. I almost gave up and went out to the store to buy another copy but it got here just in time to save me the extra buck.

Before analyzing any of the stories though, I want to say that since going quarterly there has been a steady upward climb in AMAZING's quality, I have noticed the return of some old masters and a lot of new masters-to-be. Two such people appear in the July issue, Mr. Chandler has long been absent from any publication that I know of, and not only do you have a fine story by him, but a Captain Grimes one to boot! The second is F.M. Busby, who seems to be developing into a soft-hard science writer. His two stories, "Search," which I greatly enjoyed and which was masterfully written, and "Nobody Home," which was equally as good, both deal with two rather old S.F. themes, that of time dilation and its effects on space travel, and the chronicle/travelogue story of alternate worlds. But what Mr. Busby has managed to do is that he writes about people and the problems they have with

machines, and not about machines that people have problems with. Busby has turned out to be a long needed link between the hard science s.f. and the action adventure type.

Steven Utley is one of the masters-to-be that I mentioned. He has been with us just a scant two years, and Ted, you picked it when you said that it was perfect. What can you say about a perfect story? He's only been at it two years, what's he going to do next?

The editorial was quite pleasing, and very informative. I like to think of myself as an amateur S.F. historian, and because of this I was familiar with the subject of Tom's essay, and well aware of the importance of such an article. You can be sure that I checked it out at the local library, and, ahh well, another fannish legend bites the dust, but that's the fun of legends after all.

Good luck Ted, hopefully going quarterly has given you the breathing space you needed, and we will soon be seeing AMAZING six, or even twelve times a year again soon.

STEVE DAVIDSON
1754 Hillside Dr.
Cherry Hill, N.J. 08003

It's possible, Steve. Changes are in the wind, although it's too soon to say what they'll be.—TW

Dear Ted,

It has been quite a while since I've taken the time to offer comment on AMAZING or FANTASTIC, but your recent tribulations have moved me to write—I trust you won't mind some general thoughts in lieu of the usual single-issue critique.

Today I bought several White-era AMAZINGS that pre-date my active readership; this afternoon I have been leafing through them, reading letters and features, trying to decide what made them sell (or what prevented them from selling) and most of all comparing them to your more recent products. I may only have been reading magazine sf for five years (still a substantial portion of my life) but I am beginning to think that I know what makes it tick and what might make it tick better. You have a lot to do with that. For all your faults, you have been the Lone Ranger of the Science Fiction Magazine in both pro and fan press for some time, and perhaps surprisingly you have even come up with results on occasion—Dick Geis is taking on a prozine reviewer on your advice, for instance, and of course you have raised many of today's top writers in your pages; writers who, if they are deterred by the poor rates and exposure that limit you today, still appear in other magazines and often in preference to more lucrative anthology markets. Most importantly for me, you maintain a strong editorial presence which makes your editorials the most informative and (to use a *Galaxy* word) pertinent, and the lettercolumn the most entertaining, in the field.

So. Largely because of you, I sit before my typewriter today with 1977 issues of AMAZING and FANTASTIC at hand and a few guesses at what is going wrong. I am not as well equipped as you to make such guesses, but at least I am unhampered by publishers' dicta and perhaps less likely to be subjective.

First, about the distinction between what you (and I) like, and what sells. As Ben Bova, Byron Preiss and "Doc" Smith's executors must know, pulp-adventure sells very well indeed. *Galaxy*, which claims its circulation is up to almost 90,000, has been discovering this lately, with lots of badly-written but flashy rocketship fiction and covers to match, gung-ho/optimistic features and editorials (with the semi-literate Spider Robinson in the vanguard), and now a new editor, John J. Pierce, with libertarian and anti-New Wave credentials (perhaps to match libertarian and anti-New

Wave columnist Geis?) Even *Analog* has veered away lately from experimental fiction (its recent Women's Issue a happy exception) and returned to the old technophilia-adventure formula. The last thing I want you to do is go their way. By all means continue to publish those odd pieces that please you and repulse Bova—Jack Dann's, for instance—and I won't forgive you if you discard stories like Eklund's "The Locust Descending" and Haldeman's "We Can Never Go Back" (which I suspect we would never have seen had you not been around). But on the other hand, if it will help sales and keep the magazines breathing, pander just a *little* bit more to current tastes. As it is, I think you've let your usual balance slip lately. Three issues have been dominated by long and obscure novellas by Jack Dann—however proud you are to publish them (and however justifiably), they will *not* appeal to most people, including me, and may put them off.

Second, how to operate more effectively within word-rate limits? The answer may be to put more effort into attracting new writers who will be content to offer their best work at lower prices (while not all up to your standards, the fiction in *Unearth*—all by new writers—has been surprisingly good). Of late you have published *many* too many minor works by big names, side-by-side with better pieces by newcomers. This is, of course, all opinion, but let me cite examples. Anvil's "Odds" like bad Sheckley, overly-reliant on a single plot-gimmick combined with silliness. Godwin's "Social Blunder", with pulps dialogue and remarkably sexist characterization ("Paul,! Paul!" Ellen was saying, her face bright with wonder. "Your plan worked—it worked!" and totally one-dimensional plot (Paul's "plan"—itself rather unlikely and which I worked out long before the unbelievably stupid Ellen). Lupoff's "The Whisperers", a poor excuse to update the Cthulhu Mythos with imitation high school characters (neither of whom knew who Ed Sullivan was—all my brother's high schoolmates do; one of whom didn't know simple record industry references such as "bullet" and thus has never hard an AM dj, etc.). These are not good stories, Ted. You would be far better advised to develop your new writers—everything Tom Monteleone, Dennis More, even Michael Milhaus, have written reads more smoothly than these cast-off Lupoffs, Godwins and Anvils. One of the reasons these authors can sell substandard works *is* that their names look good on magazine covers, attract interest and new readers—and I know we have argued this before, but I am still convinced that, however honest you may be with yourself, you were unconsciously biased when you read these authors' submissions. My suggestion would be to take the lead story (or a good one with a big name) and splash it all over the cover, rather than bill five or six lesser stories in small type—what *Analog* used to do (and still does most of the time), but benefiting from your superior cover art and layout. You are the only editor who bills all or most of his contents on the cover. Look at *Galaxy* and *Cosmos*, aiming at newsstand sales with the splash technique and gaudy covers. It may not be aesthetic, but it might sell.

Third, don't give up on FANTASTIC. You say you have devoted special attention to it but have failed to boost sales—that may be, but you have certainly boosted quality. Last year I nominated "The Locust Descending" for Hugo and Locus awards, this year I have "The Lady of Finnigan's Hearth" in mind—nothing comparable has appeared in AMAZING. I think FANTASTIC suffers less from the big-name syndrome, and as a result showcases those new authors who make it so exciting—More, Kaye, Parke Godwin, Charles Grant (now

with his first Nebula). But to keep it afloat? More unpleasant solutions, probably. I think you were right to emphasize the sword-and-sorcery element, following the "Conan" sales, but didn't succeed only because you didn't carry it far enough. I will wince with you, but how about sword-and-sorcery *covers* with "In the tradition of Conan, Star Wars and Tolkien!"? (Well, I'm not entirely serious—though Fabian did some nice covers that would suffice for these purposes). But even principled David Hartwell at *Cosmos* managed to smuggle an unobtrusive "Star Wars" hook onto a recent cover (plugging an excellent Delany review, by the way).

Fourth, keep on experimenting. It could be that you are just getting jaded, but I think I've noticed a hint of laziness in cover design, which used to be your forte. This year only the July AMAZING really appealed to me; it may have chilled others by being too simple—but you won't know until you try. The features can always use a little variety, as you suggested they might get with an occasional "Future in Books". How about coaxing some historical memoirs—"Mythology Deluxe" deluxe—out of big names from AMAZING's past, billing them on the cover as does *Galaxy*? You may think this a trifle dishonest—and you may have a point—but, again, it has *appeal*. The lettercolumn seems to have deteriorated as well. You've always had a penchant for printing obviously thoughtless or bigoted letters, on the defence that it is honest to give your critics equal time. But why not print only intelligent criticism and intelligent praise? Are reasoned letters so rare? And if so, might it not be better to print fewer letters? In any case, it might help if you curbed the hostility which often damages your replies. In those earlier issues, a kinder and more charitable Ted White dealt with stupidity and intelligence with equal courtesy and equal effectiveness, often ending on a happier note with a short recap and comment at the end of the column (since dropped—regretably, I think).

I have probably gone on long enough. I realize you may have thought of most of this before, anyway: there are already fewer titles on your covers, there is already a better balance (the October AMAZING, for instance: alas, of rather lower quality otherwise) with more emphasis on "action" fiction. I did want to say that I care. And isn't that just as valuable as a detailed and pseudo-scholarly exegesis of Shirley's "Shadow of a Snowstorm" or a sermon on homosexual immorality in Busby's "Nobody Home"?

PETER MANDLER
Magdalen College
Oxford OX1 4AU
ENGLAND

Peter, you've made a number of thoughtful and valid points. Unfortunately, you're not aware of all the factors I have to deal with here. Much what you assume to be under my control is in fact not *under my control. For instance, the Publisher has always dictated what will go on the covers—both the amount of type and the nature of the art—and since late 1974, has also taken over the actual design of the layout, usually by pointing to an earlier design of mine and asking for a copy. Similarly the emphasis and de-emphasis on sword & sorcery on* FANTASTIC*'s covers were a matter of the Publisher's policies. Was I really "kinder and more charitable" in earlier issues? I recall a letter from Grant Carrington (before he became an editor here) in which he took me to task for lacking those qualities. But I try. I do.*—TW

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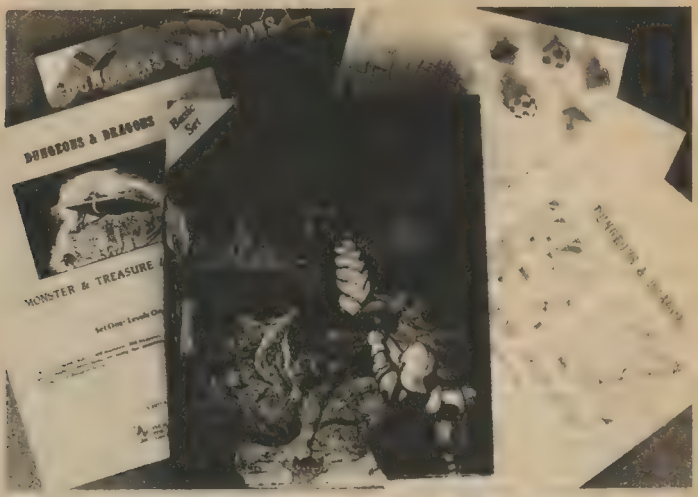

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(cont. from page 119)

I never met Palmer, although I had always hoped to. In many ways he influenced my own approach to editing this magazine, and for that I will always be in his debt. He was a man of enormous impact on our field, too little appreciated by most.

He will be missed.

—TED WHITE

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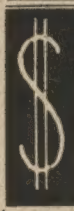

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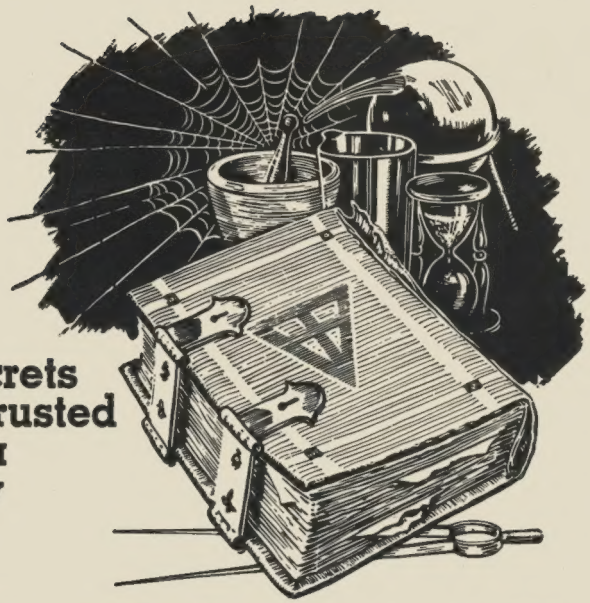

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